
EFFORTS TO INCREASE STUDENTS' INTEREST IN CHOOSING ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH STRENGTHENING PERSON CONTACT BASED PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT

Zulfa Rohmawati¹, A. Rifa'i Abun², Nur Hidayah³

¹²³Universitas Islam An Nur Lampung; Indonesia

Correspondence Email; zoelfarachma01@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the management of public relations (PR) as a liaison in increasing prospective students' interest in choosing Islamic boarding schools at Pondok Pesantren Al Mujtama' Al Islami, Al Ishlah, and Al Huda. The research employed a qualitative approach with a multisite research design conducted at the three Islamic boarding schools through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis. Informants included kiai, Islamic boarding school leaders, public relations managers, teachers, parents, and alumni, while data collection techniques consisted of observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that public relations management in the three Islamic boarding schools is implemented through diverse approaches, ranging from structured and program-based communication strategies to traditional interpersonal practices rooted in religious values and community trust. The public relations function serves as a strategic communication bridge between Islamic boarding schools and society through socialization activities, alumni networks, community engagement, and limited use of digital media. These practices contribute to the formation of institutional image and the strengthening of public trust, which subsequently influences prospective students' interests. Challenges identified include limited professional human resources, low levels of digital literacy, and constraints in optimizing modern communication media.

Keywords

Public Relations Management, Islamic Boarding School, Prospective Students' Interest, Islamic Boarding School Education.



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INTRODUCTION

The increasingly dynamic competition among Islamic educational institutions demands that Islamic boarding schools strengthen students' knowledge and morals, as well as their managerial skills in building their institutional image and communicating with the community. One strategic area that plays a central role in this regard is public relations management, which serves as a liaison between the Islamic boarding school and the external public, particularly prospective students and their parents. Professionally managed public relations is a crucial factor in increasing student interest and ensuring the continued existence of Islamic boarding schools amidst the diverse selection of Islamic educational institutions (Sopwandin, 2025). However, based on the results of initial observations at the Al Mujtama' Al Islami Karang Anyar Islamic Boarding School, Al-Ishlah Natar Islamic Boarding School, and Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding School in South Lampung Regency, it shows that the management of the public relations sector has not been fully implemented systematically and planned as an integral part of Islamic boarding school management. This condition makes the three Islamic boarding schools relevant as research objects for mapping the practices, patterns, and challenges of public relations management emerging in the context of Islamic boarding schools. This study not only describes the existing traditions of public relations management but also identifies forms of communicative practice, both conventional and sporadic, as well as the potential for developing more targeted public relations management to support the increase in interest among prospective students.

Based on field observations, the public relations (PR) management in the three Islamic boarding schools exhibited distinct characteristics. At the Al Mujtama' Al Islami Karang Anyar Islamic Boarding School, public relations activities have been running actively. However, they remain conventional and incidental, primarily focused on disseminating information about student admissions through banners, alum networks, and verbal communication with the surrounding community, without the support of strategic planning and systematic program documentation. Meanwhile, at the Al-Ishlah Natar Islamic Boarding School, the public relations function tends to be integrated with the boarding school's management structure informally, where the role of public communication is more directly carried out by the boarding school leadership and core administrators, so that the effectiveness of public relations is highly dependent on the leadership's personality and has not yet developed as a sustainable

managerial system. Meanwhile, at the Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding School, observations show that public relations activities are still relatively limited and have not become an institutional priority, marked by minimal external communication programs, low utilization of digital media, and the suboptimal involvement of student guardians and community leaders as strategic partners in building the boarding school's image. The differences in these conditions indicate that although the three Islamic boarding schools have strong internal potential, the management of public relations as a contact person to increase prospective students' interest still faces various managerial obstacles and requires strengthening planning, implementation, and evaluation that are more structured and contextual.

From an implementation perspective, observations and interviews with Islamic boarding school administrators indicate that public relations functions are often overlapped with other duties, resulting in suboptimal public communication. Public relations activities have not been managed as a continuous two-way communication system, but rather a one-way communication system for conveying information about new student registration. The involvement of the community, guardians, religious leaders, and alums as strategic partners in public relations has not been fully realized, despite the enormous potential of these social networks to build public trust and increase prospective students' interest. Furthermore, supporting factors such as the Islamic boarding school's scholarly reputation, the leadership's leadership, and strong Islamic values have not been fully packaged and communicated strategically to the wider community by the public relations department.

Table 1. Fluctuations in the Number of New Student Applicants Based on PSB Documentation

No	Islamic Boarding School	2023	2024	2025	Pattern of Change	Interpretation
1	Al Mujtama' Al Islami Karang Anyar	170	175	187	Mild fluctuation	Public communication is relatively active → interest tends to be stable
2	Al-Ishlah Natar	213	224	245	Steady increase	Dependence on leadership figures but public trust is maintained
3	Al Huda Jatimulyo	166	172	190	Increase	Public communication is relatively active → interest tends to be stable

Source: Documentation of PSB Al Mujtama' Al Islami, Al-Ishlah, Al Huda Islamic Boarding Schools in 2023, 2024, and 2025

Furthermore, based on documentation of the number of new student applicants in recent years, there has been fluctuation in prospective student interest across Islamic boarding schools. This condition indicates that the increase in prospective student interest is influenced not only by the internal quality of the Islamic boarding school, but also by the effectiveness of public relations management in building image, trust, and emotional closeness with the community. In Islamic boarding schools with relatively more active public communication, prospective student interest tends to be more stable. In contrast, those with less well-managed public relations experience a decline or stagnation in the number of applicants. This finding confirms that the role of public relations as a contact person has direct implications for the sustainability and attractiveness of Islamic boarding schools.

Several previous studies have examined the role of public relations in educational institutions. Still, most have not explicitly positioned the interests of prospective students as the primary variable, but rather linked them to other conceptually distinct variables. Research Fahim & Abdurrahman (2025) shows that public relations management influences the school's image. Still, the image is treated as an intermediate variable, and its direct relationship with prospective students' interest in choosing and enrolling in educational institutions is not explained. Furthermore, the research (Habibi, 2024) emphasizes the role of institutional communication in increasing public trust. Still, trust is a public evaluative attitude that, by definition, differs from interest, so this finding does not specifically explain the formation of prospective students' interest. (Anggraini et al., 2024) concluded that public relations activities help attract new students. However, the study still focuses on the promotion and publication aspects without explicitly describing the process of forming prospective students' interest at the pre-decision stage. Other research by (Winarto et al., 2023) shows that the intensity of interaction between institutions and the community influences the image of educational institutions. Still, the image is positioned as an intermediate result. It has not been operationalized as a factor in shaping the interests of prospective students, as contextualized in the management of Islamic educational institutions. Meanwhile, research (Ramadhan & Alif, 2025) emphasizes that public trust in educational institutions is influenced by institutional reputation, but has not yet examined the role of public relations as the main actor in strategically managing this reputation.

A study (Ndraha et al., 2024) found that public information disclosure influences public participation in education. Still, participation is a form of social engagement distinct from individual interest in choosing educational institutions. Furthermore, research by (Wahyuni et al., 2025) shows that the use of social media increases the visibility of educational institutions. Still, this visibility has not been directly measured as an indicator of prospective students' interest in enrolling. (Saputri et al., 2025) linking school and community relationships with parental loyalty, while loyalty is at the post-decision stage, not at the interest formation stage. (Suliyah, 2024) emphasizes the influence of leadership figures on public trust. Still, it has not yet positioned public relations as a strategic communications manager specifically tasked with shaping the interests of prospective students. In addition, research (Annabila et al., 2024) shows that Islamic boarding school social networks increase the institution's attractiveness, but this has not been explicitly operationalized as an interest in choosing an Islamic boarding school within a planned and sustainable public relations management framework.

A research gap arises in the context and integration of variables, namely the absence of studies that specifically position Islamic boarding school public relations as a strategic management system that functions as a long-term liaison between institutions and the community. The novelty of this research lies in the analysis of public relations planning and implementation in Islamic boarding school environments using a multisite approach that combines Islamic values, institutional communication strategies, and community social relations as a unified public relations management to increase prospective students' interest. c education public relations studies, but also offers a more comprehensive and sustainable conceptual model of Islamic boarding school public relations.

From a policy perspective and in theoretical discourse grounded in primary sources, the role of public relations in educational institutions has a strong foundation. Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System emphasizes the importance of community participation in the implementation of education, which conceptually positions public relations as a strategic instrument connecting educational institutions and the public (Indonesia, 2003). This is reinforced by the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 75 of 2016 concerning School Committees, which emphasizes active partnerships between educational units and the community, thereby requiring systematic, accountable, and sustainable management of community relations. (Education et al., 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, Akbar et al. (2021) emphasize that public relations is a management function that includes planning, implementing, and evaluating the organization's relationship with its publics. Meanwhile, Grunig, through his theory (Mastroianni, 2017), emphasizes the importance of dialogue and long-term relationships between organizations and communities. In the context of Islamic education, the concepts of value-based management and *da'wah bil hal* position Islamic boarding school community relations not merely as a promotional tool, but as a means of conveying values, building trust, and strengthening the social legitimacy of Islamic boarding schools within the community.

Based on the empirical and theoretical studies that have been described, it can be concluded that there is still a significant research gap, namely the absence of a comprehensive study discussing the management of public relations as a strategic contact person in increasing the interest of prospective students in Islamic boarding schools, especially in South Lampung Regency, because most previous studies tend to place public relations only as a function of promotion, communication, or partial formation of the institution's image without systematically examining the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation of public relations management in the context of Islamic boarding schools which have the characteristics of Islamic values and a distinctive religious community culture; Therefore, this research has academic urgency to examine in depth the practice of Islamic boarding school public relations management along with its supporting and inhibiting factors and its contribution in increasing the interest of prospective students, so that theoretically it is expected to enrich and develop the scientific treasury of Islamic education management, especially in the field of Islamic boarding school public relations, and practically it is expected to be able to become a strategic reference for Islamic boarding school managers in designing and implementing planned, communicative, and community-oriented public relations management in order to increase the interest of prospective students in a sustainable manner at Al Mujtama' Al Islami Karang Anyar Islamic Boarding School, Al-Ishlah Natar Islamic Boarding School, and Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding School in South Lampung Regency.

METHOD

This study uses a naturalistic qualitative approach and a multi-site research design. This approach was chosen to understand in depth the management practices of the public relations (PR) sector as a contact point for increasing prospective students' interest, based on the natural conditions of the Islamic boarding school, without variable manipulation. The study was conducted at three Islamic boarding schools in South Lampung Regency: Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School Karang Anyar, Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School Natar, and Al Huda Islamic Boarding School Jatimulyo. The selection of locations was based on differences in institutional characteristics, communication strategies, and public relations activities related to the acceptance of new students. Research data sources include Islamic boarding school leaders, public relations managers for daily, digital, and social media public relations and social media management, Islamic boarding school administrators, ustadz/teachers, student guardians, and institutional documents. The selection of informants was carried out through snowball sampling: starting with key figures in Islamic boarding schools, such as kyai or main leaders, then expanding to individuals who perform public relations functions, including daily activities, digital public relations, and social media management. This approach ensures that informants are directly involved and have in-depth knowledge of Islamic boarding school community relations management in each location.

Data collection was conducted through observation, structured interviews, and documentation from January to December 2025. Fieldwork employed an incidental participatory approach, in which researchers were present at specific activities to interact with key informants and to periodically observe public relations activities, without residing (live-in) at the Islamic boarding school. Observations were used to directly observe the implementation of public relations functions, the Islamic boarding school's communication patterns with the community, and the promotion and socialization strategies for new student admissions. Structured interviews aimed to gather in-depth information on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public relations programs, while documentation served as supporting data in the form of activity archives, publication media, reports, and Islamic boarding school policy documents. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and inductive drawing of conclusions to identify patterns and themes across sites. Data validity was

guaranteed through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time to ensure the consistency and credibility of the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The research findings indicate that public relations management in the three Islamic boarding schools varies in level, ranging from simple planning to systematic, programmed planning. Public relations planning generally focuses on promoting admissions, strengthening the Islamic boarding school's image and branding, and identifying prospective student targets. In practice, public relations serves as the primary liaison between the Islamic boarding school and the community through collaboration with schools, guardians, alumni, community leaders, and the use of conventional and digital media, such as social media and the Islamic boarding school's official website. However, the implementation of public relations still faces several challenges, particularly limited professional human resources, suboptimal and inconsistent digital media management, limited promotional budgets, and demands for innovative communication strategies amidst increasing competition among Islamic boarding school educational institutions.

Table 2. Public Relations Management as a Contact Person in Increasing the Interest of Prospective Students in Islamic Boarding Schools throughout South Lampung Regency

No	Islamic boarding school	Aspect	Public Relations Planning	Implementation of Public Relations as a Contact Person	Challenges in Public Relations
1	Al Mujtama' Islami Boarding School, Karang Anyar	Public Relations Strategy	Public relations planning is structured simply with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of new student admissions • Strengthening the image of Islamic boarding schools • Dissemination of information on flagship programs 	Implementation of public relations is carried out through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct outreach to the community • The role of Islamic boarding school alumni • Religious study activities • Utilization of social media as a means of 	The obstacles faced include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited professional public relations human resources • Suboptimal use of digital media • Limited promotional budget

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilization of conventional media and social media 	communication and promotion	
2	Al-Ishlah Islamic School	Natar Boarding School	Public Relations Strategy	<p>Public relations planning is carried out systematically and programmed, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of annual promotion agenda Mapping of prospective student targets Strengthening Islamic boarding school branding 	<p>The role of public relations is carried out actively as a contact person through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration with schools Coordination with student guardians Alumni involvement Utilization of the official Islamic boarding school website Use of official Islamic boarding school social media 	<p>The main challenges faced include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistency in media content management The ever-growing demands for promotional innovation
3	Al Huda Boarding School, Jatimulyo	Islamic School,	Public Relations Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public relations planning is still informal and integrated with Islamic boarding school management. The main focus of public relations is to build trust with the surrounding community through a personal approach. 	<p>Implementation of public relations is carried out through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network of community leaders Student guardian Direct communication by word of mouth 	<p>There are several obstacles, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal use of information technology Limited promotional tools Low literacy of digital media-based public relations

Source: Al Mujtama' Al Islami Karang Anyar Islamic Boarding School, Al-Ishlah Natar Islamic Boarding School, and Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding School, South Lampung Regency, 2024–2025.

Public Relations Planning to Increase Interest of Prospective Students

Public relations planning at Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School in Karang Anyar, Al-Ishlah Natar, and Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding School share a common goal: building a positive image of the institution and increasing public trust so that they are interested in sending their children to the Islamic boarding school. However, each Islamic boarding school has a different planning pattern. In general, public relations planning at the three Islamic boarding schools has not been fully

documented in a standard written strategic plan, but is carried out through agreement with the Islamic boarding school management and empirical experience in dealing with community dynamics. Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School plans public relations activities to promote new student admissions, introduce its flagship programs, and convey information about religious activities through conventional media and simple social media. This planning is flexible and adapts to the educational calendar and the momentum of religious activities in the community.

In contrast, Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School in Natar has a relatively more systematic and structured public relations plan. Public relations develops an annual work agenda that includes mapping prospective student targets, developing a branding strategy for the boarding school, scheduling outreach activities, and using digital media to communicate with the community. Public relations planning at Al-Ishlah is aligned with the boarding school's vision and mission and involves leaders, teachers, and alumni as part of the institutional communication strategy. Meanwhile, Al Huda Islamic Boarding School in Jatimulyo implements public relations planning that remains informal and is directly integrated with the boarding school's management. The focus of public relations planning is on strengthening trust in the surrounding community through personal approaches, networks of community leaders, and the role of student guardians. Although simple, this planning is considered quite relevant to the social character of the local community and can support the continued interest of prospective students in the boarding school.

Table 3. Main Findings of Public Relations Planning in Increasing the Interest of Prospective Students

No	Islamic Boarding School	Public Relations Planning Focus	Characteristics of Planning
1	Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School	Promotion of new student admissions and introduction of the Islamic boarding school's flagship programs	Simple, flexible, not yet formally documented
2	Al-Ishlah Natar Islamic Boarding School	Islamic boarding school branding, mapping of prospective student targets, and utilization of digital media	Systematic, programmed, in line with the vision and mission of the Islamic boarding school
3	Al Huda Islamic Boarding School, Jatimulyo	Strengthening public trust and personal approach	Informal, based on social relations and community leaders

Source: Al Mujtama' Al Islami Karang Anyar Islamic Boarding School, Al-Ishlah Natar Islamic Boarding School, and Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding School, South Lampung Regency, 2024–2025.

Research Results on the Implementation Approach of the Public Relations Sector as a Contact Person in Increasing the Interest of Prospective Students

Based on the results of observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies at the Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School in Karang Anyar, Al-Ishlah Natar Islamic Boarding School, and Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding School, it is known that the approach to implementing the field of public relations (public relations) as a contact person in increasing the interest of prospective students is carried out with a contextual pattern and adapts to the character of each Islamic boarding school. In general, public relations in the three Islamic boarding schools function as the main link between the institution and the community, guardians of students, religious leaders, and prospective students, through a communication approach that emphasizes religious values, beliefs, and social closeness. Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School applies a public relations approach through religious and social activities, such as public religious studies, religious study groups, and alums involvement in conveying information about the Islamic boarding school to the community. This approach is considered effective because it leverages culturally formed social networks, although the use of digital media remains supportive and has not been professionally managed.

At Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School in Natar, public relations is implemented through a more structured, communicative approach, combining direct communication with the community and the use of digital media for publication and promotion. Public relations plays an active role as a contact person through collaboration with schools, guardians, and alumni, and disseminates information through the website, official social media, and educational promotion activities. This approach demonstrates an effort to build the image of the Islamic boarding school more broadly and systematically, thereby reaching prospective students from various regions. Meanwhile, Al Huda Islamic Boarding School in Jatimulyo applies a personal, informal public relations approach, relying on word of mouth, the role of community leaders, and emotional relationships with guardians. This approach reflects the strong social trust in the Islamic boarding school within the surrounding community, although modern communication strategies do not yet support it. Overall, the implementation of public relations at the three Islamic boarding schools shows that the increase in prospective student interest is more influenced by public trust, the exemplary behavior of the

guardians, and the consistency of the communicated Islamic values than by technology-based promotional strategies alone.

Table 4. Implementation Approach of the Public Relations Sector as a Contact Person at the Islamic Boarding School

No	Islamic Boarding School	Public Relations Implementation Approach	Main Activity Forms
1	Al Mujtama' Al Islami Karang Anyar	Socio-religious approach and alumni network	Study groups, direct socialization, alumni roles
2	Al-Ishlah Natar	Communicative and structured approach, combining direct and digital media	School cooperation, social media, websites, education promotion
3	Al Huda Jatimulyo	Personal and trust-based approach to the community	Word of mouth, community leaders, guardians of students

Source: Observations, interviews, and documentation at Al Mujtama' Al Islami Karang Anyar Islamic Boarding School, Al-Ishlah Natar Islamic Boarding School, and Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding School, South Lampung Regency, 2024–2025.

Table 4 explains that the approach to implementing public relations as a contact person to increase prospective students' interest at three Islamic boarding schools in South Lampung Regency is implemented in different ways according to each institution's character, organizational culture, and capacity. Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School in Karang Anyar emphasizes a socio-religious approach by utilizing religious study activities, the role of alums, and direct communication as the main means of building community trust. Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School in Natar demonstrates a more structured and communicative public relations approach by combining direct interaction with digital media, enabling it to reach prospective students more broadly and systematically. Meanwhile, Al Huda Islamic Boarding School in Jatimulyo relies on a personal approach based on social trust through community leaders and student guardians, which, although simple, is effective within the surrounding community. Overall, this table confirms that the effectiveness of implementing public relations as a contact person is not determined by a uniform strategy, but rather by the suitability of the communication approach to the social context and values of each Islamic boarding school.

Challenges in Public Relations in Increasing the Interest of Prospective Students

Based on the results of field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies at the Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School in Karang Anyar, the Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School in Natar, and the Al Huda Islamic Boarding School in Jatimulyo, this study found that the field of public relations (PR) faces several structural and cultural challenges in efforts to increase the interest of prospective students. The main challenge across all three Islamic boarding schools is the limited number of public relations professionals specifically trained in public communication and educational marketing. The PR function is generally still carried out by the Islamic boarding school administrators or ustadz, so the planning and implementation of communication strategies are not carried out optimally or sustainably.

Furthermore, other significant challenges relate to the use of media and communication technology. Al Mujtama' Al Islami and Al Huda Islamic Boarding Schools in Jatimulyo still rely heavily on conventional approaches such as direct communication, community leader networks, and word-of-mouth promotion, which are effective locally but have limited reach. Meanwhile, Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School in Natar has begun using digital media. Still, it faces challenges with consistent content management, limited manager time, and the ever-evolving need for communication innovation. Furthermore, all Islamic boarding schools also face challenges in balancing promotional strategies with their Islamic values. Therefore, careful communication often limits public relations' flexibility in aggressive branding and publicity campaigns. This situation demonstrates that public relations challenges are not only technical but also ideological and cultural, requiring an adaptive communication approach that remains aligned with the Islamic boarding school's identity.

Table 5. Challenges in the Public Relations Sector in Increasing the Interest of Prospective Students

No	Challenge Aspects	Key Findings
1	Public Relations HR	Limited professional public relations personnel; public relations duties are carried out by administrators or religious teachers.
2	Media and Technology	The use of digital media is not yet optimal; some Islamic boarding schools still rely on conventional communication.
3	Promotion Budget	Limited funds for ongoing publication and promotional activities.
4	Branding Consistency	Image management and promotional content have not been systematically programmed.

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| 5 | Islamic Boarding School Values and Culture | Be careful in promotions so as not to conflict with Islamic values and Islamic boarding school culture. |
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Source: Observations, interviews, and documentation at Al Mujtama' Al Islami Karang Anyar Islamic Boarding School, Al-Ishlah Natar Islamic Boarding School, and Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding School, South Lampung Regency, 2024–2025.

Table 5 shows that the main challenges faced by the public relations department in increasing the interest of prospective students at the Al Mujtama' Al Islami, Al-Ishlah Natar, and Al Huda Jatimulyo Islamic Boarding Schools are multidimensional, encompassing human resources, media utilization, funding, branding consistency, and the values and culture of the Islamic boarding schools. The limited number of professional public relations personnel means that communication and promotional functions are not managed optimally and remain multitasked. Furthermore, the use of digital media and technology is uneven, so the reach of information about Islamic boarding schools remains limited, particularly in those that rely on conventional approaches. Budget constraints also limit the intensity and sustainability of promotional activities. Furthermore, the lack of a well-programmed branding strategy prevents the Islamic boarding school's image from being firmly and consistently established in the public sphere. These challenges are further complicated by the need for public relations to maintain Islamic values and Islamic boarding school culture, requiring careful implementation of promotional strategies to avoid conflicting with the identity and character of the Islamic boarding school itself.

Discussion

Public relations management in increasing student interest at Al Mujtama' Al Islami, Al Ishlah, and Al Huda Islamic Boarding Schools shows significant differences in planning and resource readiness. These findings align with educational public relations management theory. (Ardiyanti et al., 2015), which emphasizes that public relations success is determined by systematic planning aligned with the institution's goals. The practice of structured public relations planning at the Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School supports the research findings. (Kurniawan et al., 2022) states that clear educational marketing planning positively affects student interest. Conversely, informal public relations planning at Al Ishlah and Al Huda Islamic Boarding Schools supports the research findings (A. Wahyudi & Marzuki, 2025) regarding the weak image consistency resulting from the absence of

strategic planning. This condition is also relevant to the research (Pranawukir, 2021), which confirms that communication without managerial planning tends to be unsustainable. In addition, this finding strengthens Field's (Sirait et al., 2021) view that planned public relations management is directly correlated with public trust in educational institutions.

At the implementation stage, the public relations of the Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School functioned more optimally as a contact person through the use of social media, alum networks, and direct socialization, in line with organizational communication theory (Robbins et al., 2013), which places public relations as the primary link between institutions and the public. This finding supports research (Bunda et al., 2025), which emphasizes the importance of a relational approach in building public trust. The use of digital media also strengthens the research findings (Kotler & Keller, 2016) on the effectiveness of digital communication in attracting the younger generation's interest. In contrast, the limitations of public relations implementation at Al Ishlah and Al Huda Islamic Boarding Schools align with (Simatupang, 2020) findings that public relations are ineffective without the support of competent human resources. The dual position of public relations managers also strengthens the research (Ritonga, 2023) that an unclear work structure impacts low organizational performance.

Differences in public relations effectiveness are also evident in the formation of institutional image and public trust. Consistent communication management at the Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School supports the theory of educational institution branding (Judijanto et al., 2024), which emphasizes message consistency as the key to a positive image. This finding aligns with the theory (Rivaldy, 2023), which posits that an institution's reputation influences public interest. Meanwhile, interpersonal communication strategies at Al Ishlah and Al Huda Islamic Boarding Schools strengthen this theory (Shovmayanti et al., 2025). Effective interpersonal communication builds trust directly. However, the limited reach of this communication aligns with (Makhin et al., 2024) findings that a personal approach without the support of a public relations system has not optimally increased student interest. This also supports research (Harditia & Sudadi, 2025) about the importance of integrating public relations into the institutional management system.

This study identified the main challenges facing the Islamic boarding school community: limited human resources, low technology utilization, and a lack of program evaluation. These findings align

with educational quality management theory (Taali et al., 2024), which emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement based on evaluation. The absence of public relations performance indicators strengthens the research findings; (I. Wahyudi et al., 2021), which state that organizations without a control system find it difficult to develop. This condition is also relevant to the research (Nasution et al., 2025), which confirms that weak educational management in the controlling function impacts the institution's effectiveness. The limitations of digital literacy in public relations support Field's (Hidayat et al., 2024) findings on the importance of technology adaptation in educational marketing. In addition, these structural constraints align with research (Habib et al., 2021) on the urgency of professionalizing public relations in educational institutions.

The differences in the effectiveness of public relations management across the three Islamic boarding schools confirm that public relations must be positioned as an integral part of the Islamic boarding school management system, rather than merely a promotional activity. This finding aligns with management theory (Hartadi & Nasrip, 2025) (planning–organizing–actuating–controlling), which emphasizes the integration of managerial functions. The effectiveness of public relations at the Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School supports the research (Iman et al., 2025) that found that structured management of institutional and community relations increases educational competitiveness. Conversely, weak community relations at the Al Huda Islamic Boarding School strengthen the theory of innovation diffusion (Lestari, 2019) that managerial innovation is difficult to implement without structural and cultural readiness. This finding also aligns with research (Istikaroh, 2019) on the importance of consistent leadership and public relations systems. Thus, this study emphasizes the need to strategically, professionally, and sustainably strengthen Islamic boarding school public relations management.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the success of public relations management in increasing prospective students' interest is largely determined by the quality of planning, the competence of public relations human resources, the use of communication media, and the support of Islamic boarding school leadership. Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School can manage public relations more effectively because it has relatively strong systemic support. In contrast, Al Ishlah and Al Huda Islamic Boarding Schools are still at the stage of managing public relations based on traditional

beliefs. These findings strengthen the research (Susanty, 2024) that emphasizes that partnerships between educational institutions and the community need to be managed programmatically to have a significant impact on increasing public participation.

The main novelty of this research lies in the comprehensive analysis of the management of Islamic boarding school public relations as a strategic contact to increase prospective students' interest through a multi-site approach. Unlike previous studies that generally only highlight the promotion of Islamic boarding schools or the image of the institution partially, this study emphasizes the integration of public relations managerial functions from planning, implementation, to evaluation based on Islamic values and Islamic boarding school culture. In addition, this study offers novelty by mapping differences in public relations managerial readiness across Islamic boarding schools, thereby producing a model of Islamic boarding school public relations that is adaptive, contextual, and that maintains the institution's Islamic identity.

Although this study yielded comprehensive findings, several limitations warrant consideration. The study involved only three Islamic boarding schools, so the findings do not fully represent the broader practice of public relations management in Islamic boarding schools. The qualitative approach used also potentially posed subjectivity, despite data triangulation. Furthermore, this study did not quantitatively measure the increase in prospective students' interest, so the impact of public relations was analyzed primarily descriptively. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ a mixed approach and involve more Islamic boarding schools to obtain more in-depth and generalizable results.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, the three Islamic boarding schools have carried out public relations functions as liaisons between the institutions and the communities, with different characters, but still grounded in Islamic values. Public relations plays a role in building trust, shaping the institution's image, and increasing prospective students' interest through interpersonal communication, alum networks, community leaders, and promotional media. Al Mujtama' Al Islami Islamic Boarding School is more planned and adaptive, while Al Ishlah and Al Huda tend to use a traditional approach based on social proximity. It was concluded that increasing prospective students' interest is more

determined by the public relations' ability to consistently communicate the values and advantages of the Islamic boarding school. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen strategic planning, improve human resource competencies, utilize appropriate media, and conduct continuous evaluation while maintaining the values of adab and local wisdom of the Islamic boarding school.

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