

Public Relations Management Strategy in Improving School Quality at State Vocational School 1 Siabu

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the public relations (PR) management strategy implemented at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu in an effort to improve school quality. The background of this study is the importance of the role of Public Relations in building communication between schools and various external parties such as parents, the industrial world, government, and the community in order to create a positive image and improve the quality of education. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of the study indicate that (1) the public relations (PR) management strategy implemented at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu in improving school quality, the strategy includes the formation of a Public Relations team, work program planning, selection of appropriate communication media such as committee meetings, social media, and publication of school activities. (2) efforts made by SMK Negeri 1 Siabu to optimize public relations strategies to improve school quality, namely through promoting student achievements, cooperation with the community and the industrial world, and publication of school activities, Public Relations has succeeded in increasing public trust and attracting public interest in making the school a choice for quality education. (3) supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of public relations at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu, supporting factors in Public Relations management include leadership commitment, cooperation with stakeholders, and flagship programs that are able to attract public attention. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include low participation of some parents and limited resources.

Keywords

Public Relations Strategy, Education Management, School Quality, Vocational High School, Educational Communication

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a lifelong process of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Education shapes a person's character and teaches them to think critically, adapt, and contribute to society. Education can also encompass lessons taught in schools, other formal educational institutions, or through life experiences and non-formal training. One important factor determining the success of an educational institution is the quality of education. Educational quality encompasses various factors, including teaching quality, school facilities, student success, and community involvement. Public relations can help improve the quality of education (Wahyudin et al., 2024).



Schools play a crucial role in producing high-quality human resources, as education is a key pillar in a nation's development. High-quality education is increasingly needed, particularly in skills that prepare students for the workforce. As vocational secondary education institutions, vocational high schools (SMK) have a significant responsibility to improve the quality of their education to produce skilled, work-ready, and competitive graduates. Public relations (PR) management is a crucial component in achieving this goal. PR management involves communication between schools and various parties outside the school, such as parents, industry, government, and the media.(Qahar, 2016).

Effective public relations management can improve school quality in several ways, such as building a positive image in the eyes of the public, which is one of the main goals of public relations management. By establishing partnerships with the industrial world, vocational schools (SMK) are vocational education institutions that greatly require industrial involvement in curriculum development, teacher training, and providing internships for students. Schools can strengthen relationships with surrounding businesses or industries through effective public relations strategies.(Suryosubroto, 2018).

SMK Negeri 1 SIABU is one of the final secondary education institutions in the Siabu district known as SMK PK (Center of Excellence). Data obtained from SMK Negeri 1 Siabu related to Public Relations, namely, Collaboration between agencies and DU/DI to improve graduate skills is by establishing an MOU with the industrial world. The industry's contribution in providing direct learning opportunities through internships is after students carry out PKL in the industrial world. If students are able to carry out work experience, they can be called back by DU/DI to continue their abilities in the DU/DI.

This school is committed to providing quality education and preparing students to face the challenges of the working world. Through innovative programs and collaborations with various parties, Public Relations plays a role in promoting the excellence of SMK Negeri 1 Siabu as an educational institution ready to produce quality graduates. Through activities such as training, seminars, and participation in local events, Public Relations also contributes to developing students' social and professional skills, as well as strengthening relationships with industry and the business world. Thus, Public Relations at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu is at the forefront of creating an inclusive educational environment that is responsive to the needs of the community.

2. METHOD

This type of research is qualitative with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research is a research approach that emphasizes the meaning, experience, and perspective of the subjects being studied with the aim of understanding phenomena or events comprehensively and holistically.(Creswell, 2015). Qualitative research, data collected in the form of non-numerical information, such as words, images, or recordings, and then analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Qualitative research typically involves direct interaction between the researcher and the subjects through methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups (also known as focus group discussions), case studies, or participant observation. This type of research is also more flexible and focuses on the social, cultural, and psychological context behind the data collected.(Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This type of research focuses on a case or phenomenon within a specific context. The purpose of this case study is to gain a broad understanding of the phenomenon under study using multiple data sources and perspectives. The case study can be an individual, group, organization, or event, selected for its characteristics relevant to the research. Using various data sources, such as observation, interviews, and documentation, the author attempts to understand the phenomenon in its original context. This research was conducted to determine public relations management in improving school quality at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The study begins with describing the location of the research area, an overview of the Public Relations Management Strategy (PR) in Improving School Quality at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu. SMK Negeri 1 Siabu, with NPSN 10260042, is a state vocational high school located on Jalan Medan-Padang, Muara Batang Angkola, Siabu District, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra Province. This school was established in 2008, with accreditation status B based on Decree No. 1214 / BAN-SM / SK / 2018 dated December 31, 2018. SMK Negeri 1 Siabu is committed to providing quality education for students. This school is equipped with internet access and PLN electricity. The school land area reaches 2,738 square meters, which supports teaching and learning activities and extracurricular activities.

This school also focuses on developing students' character and competencies through a variety of extracurricular activities. SMK Negeri 1 Siabu is the right choice for prospective students wishing to pursue vocational high school education in Mandailing Natal Regency. This school is ready to equip its students with the knowledge and skills needed to enter the workforce or continue their education to a higher level. (Andriyani, 2020).

The determination of Public Relations strategy at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu begins with a thorough planning process, namely by setting the goals to be achieved, forming a competent and structured team, building effective communication with the community, such as social media, websites, and so on, developing promotional programs, holding events and activities that involve the community, managing online reputation such as monitoring and responding to reviews and comments on social media and websites, building collaborative programs, improving relationships with alumni as an effort to increase school promotion. This approach reflects the importance of leadership in building a positive image of the school and maintaining harmonious relationships with all stakeholders. (Fullan, 2007).

In an effort to create a positive relationship between the school, students, and parents, the role of Public Relations (PR) in the educational environment, particularly at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu, is crucial. Public Relations not only serves as a conduit of information but also as a communication bridge between various parties involved in the educational process. This school is committed to providing a quality education and preparing students to face the challenges of the workplace. Through innovative programs and collaboration with various parties,

The role of Public Relations at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu extends beyond simply conveying information, but also encompasses efforts to foster effective and harmonious communication between the school and parents, students, and the wider community. In carrying out its function, Public Relations must be able to act as a liaison, bridging the needs and expectations of all parties involved in the educational process. One key to successful Public Relations management in schools is the ability to build open and constructive two-way communication, both internally and externally. In this context, various communication channels, such as meetings, WhatsApp groups, and social media, are utilized to foster effective interactions.

SMK Negeri 1 Siabu has made efforts to optimize its public relations strategy to improve the school's quality. These efforts include delegating full responsibility to the Public Relations department, improving communication with the community, parents, and students, building a positive image, increasing transparency, and utilizing social media, such as its website, to promote the school and interact with the community. In this way, SMK Negeri 1 Siabu can improve the school's quality and build positive relationships with the community.

This shows that SMK Negeri 1 Siabu not only focuses on academic achievement, but also instills the values of entrepreneurship, creativity, and independence, so that it deserves to be called a quality and future-oriented school.

In implementing a public relations (PR) strategy within a school environment, various factors contribute to the success of programs and activities. These supporting factors serve as the primary foundation for building effective communication between the school and all stakeholders, such as parents, the community, the business and industrial sectors, and relevant agencies. In vocational

schools, particularly at SMK Negeri 1 Siabu, the role of PR is crucial in supporting various school programs, from school promotion and parent engagement to strengthening external collaboration.

In addition to supporting factors, SMK Negeri 1 Siabu faces the challenge of producing graduates who are not only skilled but also possess personality, professional ethics, and readiness to keep up with industrial and technological developments. SMK Negeri 1 Siabu, a vocational educational institution in Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra, believes that structured and successful public relations (PR) management is one strategic step that can be taken to address this issue.

State Vocational School 1 Siabu still faces various challenges in its efforts to improve the quality of education, particularly in the management of public relations (PR). These challenges include improving the quality of learning, limited supporting facilities such as a dedicated PR room, teacher competency development, a lack of human resources focused on PR functions, a limited understanding of the strategic role of PR, and a limited budget for school publications and promotions.(Hamalik, 2018).

Not all teachers and parents have stable internet access. School social media is not being utilized optimally to reach the wider community. Some school members believe that Public Relations is solely responsible for documenting and photographing activities. As a result, public relations strategies are not systematically incorporated into school planning.(Mulyasa, 2021)However, an appropriate public relations management strategy can significantly contribute to addressing these challenges. By strengthening the role of public relations, schools can establish more effective communication with the community, build a positive image, expand partnership networks, and increase the involvement of parents and external parties in the educational process. Therefore, optimizing public relations strategies needs to be a crucial part of comprehensive school quality improvement planning.(Mulyasa, 2013).

Discussion

The research results show that vocational schools have implemented a public relations management strategy by forming a dedicated team responsible for building effective communication between the school and parents, the community, and the business world. This strategy aligns with the two-way communication theory, which states that effective communication must be reciprocal to foster understanding and collaboration between the school and stakeholders.(Hasibuan, 2021).

In the digital era, vocational schools (SMK) utilize social media as a strategic tool to convey information, promote school activities, and build closer relationships with the public. This aligns with the concept of modern public relations management, where digital media plays a central role in reaching a broad, fast, and interactive audience. Social media is used to share information about flagship programs, student achievements, and extracurricular activities, which also supports the development of a positive school image.(Johnson & Johnson, 2020).

Public relations strategies have also been shown to help schools bridge diverse interests, resolve student issues by involving parents, and promote the school's strengths to the wider community. This reinforces the school's position.(Sardiman, 2020), that public relations strategy is part of the technical and communication planning that supports the institution's goals and builds a positive public perception of the organization. The public relations management strategy implemented by SMK is not simply a one-way information activity, but reflects a strategic, planned approach, and is in accordance with the theoretical principles of public relations in education. Good public relations management has contributed to increasing public trust, parental involvement, and building the image of a quality and superior school.

The role of Public Relations also has a spiritual dimension as reflected in Islamic values, namely conveying information in a trustworthy and wise manner. School Public Relations prioritizes honest, polite, and educational communication, in order to build a school's reputation that is not only academically intelligent, but also has noble morals. Thus, the role of Public Relations in building a school's image is not only limited to promotion or publication, but is a strategic effort based on the theory, values, and practice of organizational communication.(Terry, 2003)A positive image is a long-term asset for a school because it impacts increased public trust, the number of new enrollments, external partnerships, and ultimately the overall quality of education.(Sutrisno, 2013).

Vocational schools (SMK) collaborate closely with the business and industrial world (DU/DI), for example through internship programs and the signing of MOUs. This supports the theory of community engagement, which states that external involvement can add value to education, particularly in developing student skills relevant to the needs of the workforce. Furthermore, SMKs actively communicate with parents through committee meetings and online communication groups. Parental involvement in decision-making demonstrates a participatory approach that strengthens the overall education system.

This collaboration reflects the implementation of the empowerment function outlined in the theoretical study, where Public Relations not only conveys information but also creates a participatory and interactive space between the school and the external public. Through this collaboration, the community feels involved and has a role to play in the educational process at the school.

The impact of the Public Relations management strategy implemented in vocational schools is clearly visible in improving the quality of schools, in line with the quality of education not only depending on the teaching and learning process, but also on the extent to which schools are able to involve the community, build trust, and establish productive cooperation.

The public relations management strategy implemented in vocational high schools has had a significant impact on improving school quality. Research shows that the implementation of the public relations strategy has successfully strengthened internal and external relationships, built a positive image, and increased community participation in supporting educational activities. This clearly reflects the results of systematic management focused on achieving the educational institution's goals (Farizal, 2021).

One of the main impacts of the Public Relations strategy is increased public trust in the school, as evidenced by parents' enthusiasm for attending committee meetings, community involvement in school activities, and the increasing number of enrollees year after year. The positive image fostered by Public Relations has fostered the perception of the school as an open, communicative, and quality-oriented institution. Public Relations has also positively impacted the quality of human resources within the school. Collaborations with industry, such as internship programs and teacher training by external partners, have improved teacher competency and student readiness for the workplace. Furthermore, the use of social media and the digitization of information by Public Relations has also impacted the effectiveness of information delivery.

Within the context of national education quality standards (PP No. 19/2005), public relations strategies have assisted schools in meeting process, content, and graduate competency standards. For example, through the promotion of flagship programs, publicizing student activities, and enhancing external relations, schools have successfully strengthened their identity and competitiveness at the local and regional levels.

Based on the overall findings and theoretical reinforcement, it can be concluded that public relations strategies are not merely supportive but integral to a school's quality management system. Public relations is not merely a promotional tool, but also a strategic actor that creates collaborative networks, shapes public opinion, and maintains the institution's reputation, ensuring its credibility and competitiveness.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The public relations (PR) management strategy at vocational schools has been implemented systematically and in a planned manner. This strategy includes establishing a PR team, planning work programs, selecting appropriate communication media such as committee meetings, social media, and publicizing school activities. This approach aligns with two-way communication theory, internal and external relations strategies, and management principles.

The role of Public Relations in building a school's image is crucial and has a far-reaching impact. Through promoting student achievement, collaborating with the community and industry, and publicizing school activities, Public Relations successfully increases public trust and attracts interest in

the school as a quality education option. Collaboration between schools, the community and industry (DU/DI) significantly contributes to educational quality. Industry supports student skills development through internship programs and training, while the community supports school activities through active participation. Public Relations serves as a strategic bridge in fostering this communication and collaboration.

Public relations strategies have a significant impact on improving school quality, particularly in terms of increasing parental participation, school reputation, graduates' readiness for the workforce, and the professionalism of educators. This strategy supports the achievement of national education standards and strengthens the role of schools as institutions responsive to the challenges of the times.

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