



Strengthening Public Relations Strategies of the Undergraduate Program in Early Childhood Islamic Education at IAIN Pontianak

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Abstract

The development of digital technology encourages higher education institutions to adapt with innovative communication strategies in the management of public relations. The Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) study program at IAIN Pontianak faces challenges in building academic branding because the public relations activities carried out are still merely informative. This study aims to analyze the public relations strategies implemented by the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak and to provide innovative recommendations for strengthening academic branding. The research method used is qualitative, with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis is conducted by including data condensation, data presentation, and conclusions as well as verification. The results of this study indicate that Instagram functions as a promotional medium for academic and social activities, while the website serves as an information tool that displays identity, vision-mission, curriculum, and the scientific works of lecturers and students. Nevertheless, the management is still less than optimal due to the absence of a public relations team, and the content displayed is still limited to information dissemination. The implications of these findings contribute to strengthening the theoretical perspective on public relations in higher education with an interactive and participatory approach.

[Perkembangan teknologi digital mendorong Perguruan Tinggi untuk beradaptasi dengan strategi komunikasi yang inovatif dalam pengelolaan public relations. Program Studi Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini (PIAUD) IAIN Pontianak menghadapi tantangan dalam membangun branding akademik karena aktivitas public relations yang dilakukan masih sebagai sarana informative. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi public relations yang dilaksanakan oleh program studi PIAUD IAIN Pontianak serta memberikan rekomendasi inovatif dalam penguatan branding akademik. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan dengan meliputi kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan simpulan serta verifikasi. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa instagram berfungsi sebagai media promosi aktivitas akademik dan sosial sedangkan website berperan sebagai sarana informasi yang menampilkan identitas, visi-misi, kurikulum, karya ilmiah dosen dan mahasiswa. Walaupun demikian, pengelolaan tersebut masih kurang optimal karena belum

terbentuknya tim public relations dan konten yang ditampilkan masih terbatas pada penyampaian informasi. Implikasi dari temuan ini adalah berkontribusi pada penguatan perspektif teoritis mengenai public relations di Perguruan Tinggi dengan pendekatan interaktif dan partisipatif.]

Keywords: Public Relations, Communication, Study Program, Early Childhood Islamic Education

Introduction

Public relations has a strategic role in higher education as the manager of communication between the institution and the public, students, lecturers, partners, and the media. The function of public relations in higher education is responsible for promoting the vision, mission, study programs, and institutional achievements to the public (Khoirunnisak et al., 2024). In the digital era and with the openness of information, public relations play a strategic role in building the image, reputation, and trust of the public towards higher education institutions. The rapid development of the digital era has made the role and practice of public relations in various institutions, including the academic environment, undergo transformation. The presence of social media and various other digital platforms has changed the patterns of interaction between organizations and the public (Machmudah et al., 2024). The role of public relations becomes a hope for higher education institutions to achieve a measurable process in developing the existence of the organization.

Public relations is the activity of planning, implementing, and evaluating using communication carried out by an organization or institution. Therefore, public relations plays an important role in developing higher education, especially concerning relationships with the public (Fathurrochman et al., 2022). Public relations is not just a form of information openness in higher education but also builds a positive image to enhance the institution's reputation, improve services to students, and serve as a means of promotional media in recruiting new students. Higher education public relations are required to continuously innovate in utilizing communication media, both conventional and digital, to effectively and sustainably meet the informational needs and expectations of the community amidst the digital era. Moreover, digital media has a significant positive effect on stakeholder trust and commitment to the organization (Tong, 2022).

Therefore, the role of public relations in higher education institutions becomes one of the important elements in supporting the achievement of the institution's vision and mission. (Afriani & Timan, 2024). Public relations does not only function as a communicator of information but also as a link between the university, alumni, the community, prospective students, the government, and other cooperation partners. Public relations is required to develop creative, adaptive, and information technology-based communication strategies so that the image of the university remains relevant and competitive (Wulyatiningsih & Mandagi, 2023). In addition, the integration of public relations with university management will strengthen coordination among faculties, study programs, and the administration of the university, thus facilitating the implementation of development programs, both in academic and non-academic fields. Thus, public relations plays a role in building public trust, strengthening networks, and enhancing the competitiveness of higher education institutions at the local, national, and international levels (Rachman et al., 2025; Ramadhan & Sarwono, 2024).

Studies on public relations in higher education have been extensively conducted by researchers, such as public relations strategies in building image in the digital era (Andini et al., 2025; Hanifah et al., 2025; Karmilah et al., 2025; Nyagadza & Mazuruse, 2021). In addition, studies on the use of digital media in public relations at higher education institutions also show that the use of technology such as social media, websites, and other digital platforms has an impact on strengthening the development of the institution (Ayman et al., 2020; Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Nyabera & Mwita, 2025; Ruiz-Herrera et al., 2025; Sobaih et al., 2020). In other aspects, many studies examine how higher education builds

relationships with students, alumni, media, and partners to strengthen institutional relations through public relations (Anani-Bossman, 2022; Anisa et al., 2024; Otiso, 2025; Syukri & Sumarni, 2021).

In contrast to previous studies, the research gap in this study focuses on the Early Childhood Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini*/PIAUD) study program at IAIN (*Institut Agama Islam Negeri*/ State Islamic Institute) Pontianak in using public relations to improve services to students, build relationships, and disseminate information to the community. This study is very important, especially since discussions on public relations in higher education tend to focus more on general institutional branding strategies, the use of digital media at the university level, or the management of public relations within the faculty scope. However, studies specifically examining the implementation of public relations strategies at the program study level are still very limited. Therefore, this research is expected to contribute new insights to enrich the literature on public relations in higher education by presenting a more contextual micro perspective and providing practical recommendations for strengthening the image and services, particularly for the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak. Furthermore, strengthening public relations based on information technology has become a strategic necessity in enhancing the competitiveness and image of higher education amid the increasingly competitive dynamics of the digital era.

Method

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the roles and public relations strategies in the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program at IAIN Pontianak. The qualitative approach employed by the researchers aims to gain a deep understanding of communication practices, service improvement, and image development strategies implemented at the study program level. This research uses a case study design with a focus on the PIAUD Study Program as the primary unit of analysis. This design was chosen so that the researcher can describe contextually and in detail the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public relations strategies in higher education. The research informants consist of program managers, lecturers, students, and education personnel who are directly involved in public relations activities. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select participants who have relevant experience and understanding, particularly regarding public relations and study program management. In this study, a total of eight informants were interviewed to obtain data from policy makers to the recipients of the study program services. In addition, data collection was conducted through interviews specifically related to public relations strategies and challenges. The researcher also conducted observations of public relations activities and digital interactions to strengthen the findings from the interviews. Finally, the researcher performed document analysis on study program reports, promotional materials, and digital media content to understand the study program's public relations strategies. The collected data was analyzed using the Miles & Huberman model, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and conclusions, as well as verification (Miles et al., 2014).

Results and Discussion

Development and Innovation Strategies of the PIAUD Study Program at IAIN Pontianak

The Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) study program was established based on the mandate carried out by IAIN Pontianak after undergoing institutional transformation from a State Islamic College (STAIN) to a State Islamic Institute (IAIN). This study program is under the auspices of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training (FTIK) and obtained operational permission through Decision Number 1473 of 2014 with an accreditation status of C. Before officially being named PIAUD, this program had a history that began with the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program (PGRA). As a follow-up, the campus promptly submitted a feasibility study and a proposal for the

establishment of the PIAUD undergraduate program to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. This effort yielded results in 2014 with the approval of the establishment of this study program. Graduates of PIAUD will receive a Bachelor of Education (S.Pd) degree (Rahnang et al., 2021).

The Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program (PIAUD) aims to produce graduates who excel in mastering early childhood education knowledge, with an emphasis on mastering five main competencies, namely religious or spiritual, pedagogical, social, and personality competencies. Graduates are expected to have a comprehensive understanding of Islamic early childhood education, religion, and Islam, as well as the culture of Kalimantan. In addition, the Early Childhood Education Program Study is committed to producing and developing knowledge creatively and innovatively, especially in the field of early childhood education and research-based teaching. The Early Childhood Education Program Study at IAIN Pontianak also aims to shape educators and educational staff who have openness, are able to appreciate differences, and can collaborate in developing society, especially in the field of Islamic education for young children. The Early Childhood Teacher Education study program aims to become a supporting institution in the development of early childhood education institutions, particularly in educational units such as Raudhatul Athfal, Islamic Kindergartens, and Al-Qur'an Education Parks (based on the interview results with a PIAUD lecturer from IAIN Pontianak, June 2025).

In addition, innovation is carried out by integrating digital technology into learning, such as the development of interactive learning media and the use of digital platforms to support both academic and non-academic processes. From the aspect of national human resources, the study program seeks to improve the quality of lecturers through training, workshops, and involvement in academic and international forums. This aims to strengthen the competencies of lecturers in the fields of early childhood education and Islamic studies, while also increasing research productivity and scientific publications. In addition, students are encouraged to actively engage in research activities and community service, as well as academic and non-academic competitions, thus enhancing their skills according to job market needs. Meanwhile, innovations are carried out through collaboration with early childhood education institutions and government and private agencies in order to expand the network of field practices and open opportunities for graduates (based on the interview results with a PIAUD lecturer from IAIN Pontianak, June 2025). Thus, the development and innovation strategies are designed not only to enhance internal quality but also to strengthen the image and competitiveness of the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak as a center for the development of Islamic-based early childhood education in West Kalimantan.

The role of public relations is an important instrument in realizing that vision and mission. Public relations functions to build and maintain a positive image, strengthen relationships with the community, and promote the advantages of study programs to prospective students, collaborators, and other stakeholders. Through the use of digital media such as official websites, social media, and scientific publications, public relations is able to disseminate academic information widely and transparently, while also serving as a two-way communication channel between the campus and the community (Hia et al., 2020). The public relations strategy is also directed towards increasing public trust in the quality of education provided. Study programs regularly publish academic activities, seminars, research, and community service to strengthen institutional reputation. In addition, public relations plays a role in building partnerships with educational institutions, professional organizations, and local governments so that the existence of PIAUD IAIN Pontianak can be recognized as a center of knowledge and innovation in the field of early childhood education based on Islamic values and the local wisdom of West Kalimantan. With this approach, public relations is not only a promotional tool but also a means of strategy for the sustainable development of institutions in the digital era.

The Role of Public Relations in the Branding of the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program at IAIN Pontianak

Public Relations (PR) has a strategic role in building, strengthening, and maintaining a positive image of the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program (PIAUD) at IAIN Pontianak. As one of the spearheads of institutional communication, PR is responsible for conveying key messages that represent the strengths of the study program to students, prospective students, alumni, partners, and the general public. Branding the study program is key to enhancing the appeal and trust of the community in the quality of education provided to students, both in the learning process and in non-academic activities.

In the context of PIAUD IAIN Pontianak, branding does not only focus on promoting academic excellence but also on Islamic values, West Kalimantan culture, and the competencies of graduates who excel in mastering early childhood education science. PR plays a role in packaging a positive image through various integrated communication strategies, starting from the dissemination of information digitally through the official website, social media, and scientific publications to organizing academic activities, seminars, and training that can enhance the reputation of the study program in the eyes of the public. In implementing public relations using digital platforms, there are at least two media used by the PIAUD IAIN Pontianak study program, namely:

1. Instagram

Instagram serves as a promotional tool through content related to the activities of the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak to the public (Watkins & Smith, 2022). In uploading content, the PIAUD study program strives to always provide educational or informational content related to the performance that has been carried out, especially for students. In this regard, the uploaded content emphasizes the needs of students, the academic community, and society. In using Instagram, the PIAUD study program presents information to students or the public to broaden the reach of the programs that have been carried out, both in teaching, research, and community service by the academic community of IAIN Pontianak. The PIAUD study program also aims to publish content not only to disseminate information but also to motivate students to enhance their capacities as students (based on an interview with NH, a lecturer at PIAUD IAIN Pontianak, July 2025).

In this case, Instagram plays a role in supporting branding and public relations efforts for the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak. Instagram serves not only as a platform for conveying administrative information but also for building social relationships with students, alumni, the community, and the academic civitas of IAIN Pontianak. The content published on Instagram includes activities related to lectures, seminars, student achievements, and more, to create a positive image and highlight the excellence of the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak. The functions of public relations on the Instagram account of the PIAUD study program are 1) to support the main activities of management in achieving common goals; 2) to build harmonious relationships between lecturers, students, academic civitas, and the community; 3) to identify anything related to the opinions, perceptions, and responses of students and the community towards the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak; 4) to serve the needs of students and provide advice to leaders and lecturers for the purpose and benefit of all; 5) to create two-way reciprocal communication, and to manage the flow of information, publications, and messages from the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak to the public in order to create a positive image (Sartika, 2021).

The Instagram account of PIAUD IAIN Pontianak as a public relations media is [piaudftik_iain_pontianak](#), which aims to emphasize information transparency, especially in the academic field. This account serves as an effective communication medium for the PIAUD Study Program at IAIN Pontianak to expand information dissemination and act as a promotional medium for development and innovation to build the program's reputation. The use of Instagram is crucial for

educational institutions, particularly to strengthen the public relations strategy of the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program at IAIN Pontianak, which certainly differs from its use for personal needs. There are several important aspects to consider, starting from account planning and content management. Several steps to optimize the use of Instagram according to Puspitasari & Purwani (2022), include:

- a. Presenting posts consistently according to the planned schedule. This not only keeps the account's image active but also ensures that followers continuously receive up-to-date information through the Instagram feed.
- b. Building interaction with followers through relevant content and responding to comments or questions to enhance engagement with followers.
- c. Maximizing the use of hashtags to broaden the reach of followers and strengthen the identity of the study program.
- d. Providing ease for Instagram users to obtain information about the study program with informative and creative content presentation.

In the context of the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program at IAIN Pontianak, the completeness and accuracy of information are crucial aspects in building a positive image of the study program. With the presentation of informative and creative information, the public can form a positive perception. However, if the information provided is lacking in informativeness and creativity, the image that is formed will not be optimal and may decrease the public's trust in the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program at IAIN Pontianak (Febrianti et al., 2023). The presence of digital communication media, especially Instagram, provides a strategic space to reach target audiences more effectively. In the context of strengthening the public relations strategy of the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program at IAIN Pontianak, the effectiveness of Instagram is reflected in the platform's ability to disseminate information informatively to the public. Furthermore, the use of Instagram also offers cost efficiency in communication and promotion compared to conventional media, making it an important instrument in building a positive image and increasing the visibility of the study program in the public sphere (Mutiah et al., 2021).

The utilization of Instagram in communication strategies not only serves as a one-way information dissemination medium but also facilitates two-way interaction between the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program at IAIN Pontianak and the audience. Through features like comments, direct messages, and more, the audience can ask questions, provide testimonials, and share experiences that are directly responded to by the program's public relations. Additionally, audience interaction with posts, such as liking, sharing, or tagging the official account of the study program, can create a viral effect, expand the reach of information, and enhance the visibility and positive image of the study program in the digital space (Habibi et al., 2025; Handes, 2024).

2. Website

The website is one of the strategic communication media in strengthening the role of public relations of a higher education institution (Amelia et al., 2024; Triyono, 2018). For the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program (PIAUD) at IAIN Pontianak, the website serves as a digital showcase that displays the identity, vision-mission, curriculum, academic activities, and various relevant information for students, prospective students, and the general public (based on the interview results with RH, a lecturer at PIAUD IAIN Pontianak, July 2025). From the perspective of public relations, the existence of a website not only serves as a one-way information channel but also plays a role as a medium to build a positive image of the study program. Information that is presented in a complete, accurate, and structured manner can help the public obtain a comprehensive view of the quality of the study program (Septiyani et al., 2024; Shilfani et al., 2025; Supriadi et al., 2025). This is

relevant to the function of public relations in creating transparency, enhancing accountability, and strengthening public trust in the institution. Additionally, the website can serve as an interactive communication medium through features such as the latest news, announcements, and contact forms that allow the audience to convey questions or feedback. Therefore, the website not only serves as an information medium but also as a strategic instrument in expanding networks, strengthening academic branding, and supporting the visibility of the PIAUD Study Program at IAIN Pontianak in the digital space.

In the management of the website <https://piaud.iainptk.ac.id> by the PIAUD IAIN Pontianak, there are important aspects that support public relations strategies. The strength of the website lies in the completeness of the content displayed on the site. This includes various information related to the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak, such as profiles that encompass the vision and mission, organizational structure, and accreditation certificates. Furthermore, the website also features the PIAUD study program curriculum, which can be downloaded by the public, including scientific works in the form of books and journals created by faculty and students. Another advantage of the website is its design and appearance, presented with attractive images and easy access for the public.

Nevertheless, there are some shortcomings in the website of the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak, such as the information platform not providing a space for communication with the audience. In addition, the information presented is also not updated, so regular maintenance and monitoring of the website are required. The website management should be carried out by a special public relations team from the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak. Monitoring is conducted to ensure that the information displayed is up-to-date and relevant to be communicated. One strategy that can be implemented to strengthen the role of public relations through the website is by applying SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and SEM (Search Engine Marketing). SEO works to increase the visibility of a website on search engines like Google so that when the audience searches for information related to early childhood education based on Islam, PIAUD studies in West Kalimantan, or early childhood education study programs at IAIN, the PIAUD IAIN Pontianak website will appear on the first page of search results. The higher the position of the website in the search results, the greater the opportunity for the public to access and learn about the study program. This will enhance the digital visibility of the study program and expand the reach of visits to the website (Sumarni et al., 2025).

Moreover, the website also serves as a primary information center for the audience as well as a medium for carrying out various follow-up actions, such as filling out forms, registering, or accessing certain services. With a structured design and proper optimization, the website can provide a better user experience and drive conversions. Additionally, the website offers a space for the audience to gain a deeper understanding of the identity, services, and values offered through the presentation of content such as profiles, articles, testimonials, and a frequently asked questions list for the PIAUD program at IAIN Pontianak (Sari et al., 2025). The utilization of information technology allows the audience to access various information while encouraging the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak to adapt through more responsive communication and marketing strategies to public needs. Technological developments such as artificial intelligence (AI) and data analysis also open opportunities for the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak to understand audience behavior more thoroughly. With this data support, the PIAUD study program can adjust the form of services and the content displayed on the website, thereby creating relevant information that meets public needs (Salsabila et al., 2024).

Innovative Recommendations for Enhancing Public Relations Strategies of the Undergraduate Program in Early Childhood Islamic Education at IAIN Pontianak

The PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak faces a special challenge in its branding efforts through public relations. This is because the public relations activities conducted are only informative and have not yet shown strategic efforts in building a long-term reputation to assert PIAUD IAIN Pontianak as an excellent study program in the academic field. Nevertheless, public relations can be carried out in various more innovative forms so that it does not only involve conveying information to the public. Therefore, there should be recommendations regarding the shortcomings of the public relations conducted by the PIAUD Study Program at IAIN Pontianak so that it can develop well-planned digital content through Instagram and the website.

One of the practices of social media management can follow the steps taken by a private university in Yogyakarta by forming a special team responsible for managing the Instagram account and website with a structured working system. The team consists of several people who play the roles of person in charge, content idea initiator, and a link between the public relations team and the university leadership, as well as admins, graphic designers, video editors, talents, and streaming operators. Each person has duties according to their responsibilities to present information to the public (Imama & Hidayati, 2024). In this case, the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak can adopt the same pattern by forming a public relations team consisting of lecturers, educational staff, and students.

In addition, public relations must strengthen academic branding by showcasing the advantages that differentiate it from other PIAUD programs in Indonesia. The advantage is a characteristic of the organization or institution, so it is necessary to convey this information to the public and build a positive perception, especially among the public and the audience (Norman et al., 2023). This is necessary to identify academic strengths, including the curriculum, quality of lecturers, and flagship programs that support the development of student competencies. Therefore, in public relations and on the website, it is essential to publish information regarding the achievements of lecturers, students, and the activities of the *Tri Dharma* of Higher Education, which must be communicated consistently, especially on the website and social media (Bairizki, 2021).

The public relations conducted by PIAUD IAIN Pontianak must use an interactive approach, that is, implementing two-way communication with the public, including academic consultation services for students. This strategy can be combined with the utilization of digital technology to enhance the effectiveness of communication strategies and to meet public needs. Involving higher education leaders, such as rectors and deans, also contributes significantly to public relations. Higher education institutions through websites and Instagram are not only meant to provide information but also to respond to questions and criticisms from students and the community. Therefore, it is necessary to have professional management to convey information, which indicates a change in the communication paradigm from a one-way model to a participatory pattern (Irwan & Misidawati, 2025).

Thus, the strategy for strengthening public relations in the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak is not only a means of conveying information but also a way to build sustainable relationships with students and the public. An interactive and participatory approach requires synergy between the management of Instagram and the website, the involvement of the leadership of IAIN Pontianak, and a professional team in public relations. If this is implemented by the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak, then public relations will be able to enhance the academic image of PIAUD IAIN Pontianak as a superior and competitive study program in the digital era. This is of course relevant to the symmetrical two-way communication theory in public relations that emphasizes reciprocal interaction, transparency, accountability, and information openness to the public.

Conclusion

This study shows that the public relations strategy in the PIAUD program at IAIN Pontianak is still informative in nature and has not been integrated into building an academic image for the public. The key findings of this research are, *first*, the utilization of Instagram and the website as digital media has the potential to strengthen academic branding and increase the visibility of the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak. *Second*, there are shortcomings in the professional management of public relations, limitations in two-way communication, and a lack of innovation in the presentation of digital content. To improve the public relations practices of the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak, it is necessary to form a public relations team with structured tasks for communication strategies in managing digital media. This research provides academic contributions, particularly regarding the importance of interactive and participatory communication approaches in public relations strategies in higher education. However, this study has limitations in its scope, focusing only on the PIAUD study program at IAIN Pontianak, so the results cannot be generalized to all other PIAUD study programs in Indonesia. Therefore, future research should expand the scope of study to other programs in higher education to obtain comprehensive findings regarding public relations practices in higher education.

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