Public Relations Strategies To Improve Competitiveness At Rejang Lebong State High School 4

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Abstrak: *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi public relation (humas) dalam memperkuat daya saing lembaga di SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong. Pendekatan penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan teknik observasi dan wawancara terhadap pihak humas sekolah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan humas SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong berorientasi pada penyelarasan visi humas dengan visi sekolah, yaitu "unggul, religius, dan berwawasan lingkungan." Implementasi strategi komunikasi dilakukan melalui publikasi kegiatan akademik maupun non-akademik menggunakan berbagai media digital seperti Instagram, TikTok, dan YouTube. Pemanfaatan media sosial tersebut menjadi sarana promosi efisien dan berbiaya rendah, yang secara signifikan meningkatkan citra positif serta memperkuat kredibilitas sekolah di mata masyarakat. Selain itu, humas juga berperan membangun hubungan harmonis antara warga sekolah dan publik eksternal melalui penyampaian informasi yang transparan dan bernilai edukatif. Upaya ini berdampak pada meningkatnya minat peserta didik baru tanpa harus melakukan promosi konvensional. Dengan demikian, strategi public relation berbasis digital terbukti efektif, efisien, dan adaptif terhadap perkembangan komunikasi modern, serta berkontribusi nyata dalam peningkatan daya saing sekolah.*
Kata kunci: Humas Sekolah, Reputasi, Strategi Komunikasi, Wakil Kepala Sekolah, Era Digital

Abstract: This study aims to analyze public relations strategies in strengthening the competitiveness of institutions at SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong. The research approach uses qualitative methods with observation and interview techniques with the school's public relations department. The results show that the public relations activities at SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong are oriented towards aligning the vision of public relations with the school's vision, which is "excellent, religious, and environmentally conscious." The communication strategy is implemented through the publication of academic and non-academic activities using various digital media such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The use of social media has become an efficient and low-cost promotional tool, which has significantly improved the school's positive image and strengthened its credibility in the eyes of the community. In addition, public relations also plays a role in building harmonious relationships between the school community and the external public through the delivery of transparent and educational information. These efforts have resulted in increased interest from new students without the need for conventional promotion. Thus, the digital-based public relations strategy has proven to be effective, efficient, and adaptive to developments in modern communication, as well as contributing significantly to increasing the school's competitiveness.
Keywords: *School Public Relations, Reputation, Communication Strategy, Vice Principal, Digital Era*

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of educational communication has undergone significant shifts in recent years, reshaping the ways in which schools cultivate reputation and public confidence. As information flows increasingly migrate to digital spaces, especially among younger audiences, academic achievement alone no longer guarantees institutional competitiveness. Families and students now rely on online impressions, visual narratives, and mediated interactions when evaluating school quality, compelling educational institutions to rethink how they present themselves to the public. Public relations (PR) practices, once perceived as supplementary administrative tasks, have thus become integral to the broader strategy of institutional identity building and reputation management.[1] Growing scholarship in communication studies highlights this evolution, noting that PR now encompasses narrative construction, dialogic engagement, and timely responsiveness to public concerns.

For schools, these developments carry particular weight because education is a service that is deeply shaped by interpersonal relationships and institutional climate. Unlike physical goods, educational services are intangible, experienced directly through teacher–student interactions, and dependent on consistent professional behavior.[2] Given these characteristics, a school's reputation is fragile and can be influenced not only by student performance but also by how effectively the institution communicates its values, accomplishments, and commitments. Recent literature emphasizes that well-orchestrated PR efforts especially those utilizing digital media can strengthen a school's credibility, clarify its identity, and connect it with broader communities.[3] However, much of the existing research focuses on urban or higher-education contexts, leaving limited empirical insight into how public secondary schools in regional areas conceptualize and operationalize effective PR.

SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong provides a compelling example for such an investigation. Interviews with the school's Vice Principal for Public Relations reveal that communication activities are deliberately aligned with the school's foundational values: excellence, religiosity, and environmental stewardship. The school ensures that photographs, announcements, video highlights, and daily documentation consistently reflect these principles. This intentional consistency illustrates what scholars describe as strategic alignment, in which communication serves as a direct expression of

[1] Marelby Amado Mateus and Fernando Juarez Acosta, 'Reputation in Higher Education : A Systematic Review', 7.June (2022), pp. 1–19, doi:10.3389/feduc.2022.925117.

[2] Kai Zhang, 'Perceived School Climate Support Moderates the Relationship Between Teachers ' Growth Mindset and Work Engagement', 2024, doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/ educsci14121283.

[3] Sudadi Harditia, 'STRATEGI MANAJEMEN HUMAS DALAM MEMBANGUN', 2025, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/al-marsus.v3i1.9560 AL-MARSUS:

institutional identity.[4] Although previous studies acknowledge the importance of such alignment, few examine how it is implemented in everyday school practice, making this case both contextually relevant and theoretically meaningful.

At the same time, changes in youth media habits particularly those of Generation Z demand that schools adopt communication strategies that resonate with visual culture and rapid information consumption. This generation relies heavily on short-form videos, curated images, and fast-moving social media feeds to make judgments about institutions.[5] Research suggests that digital platforms, when used strategically, allow schools to communicate in a manner that is interactive, authentic, and immediate.[6] SMA Negeri 4 demonstrates this shift through its active use of Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where school activities are presented in forms that reflect student creativity and contemporary digital aesthetics. This approach reflects a participatory PR model, where students contribute directly to communication processes.[7]

The involvement of the student council (OSIS) as content creators further strengthens this participatory dimension. Students not only appear in school publications but also generate and share materials through their personal networks, creating a peer-driven amplification effect described in digital communication studies.[8] Content produced by students tends to be viewed as more sincere and emotionally resonant, deepening audience trust and engagement.[9] These dynamics align with findings that emotionally compelling and naturally presented digital content is more likely to spread widely and shape public impressions.[10] A notable instance of this occurred when a simple, emotionally charged graduation video created by SMA Negeri 4 students gained widespread attention and was even reposted by the Governor of

[4] Oki Dermawan and Zohaib Hassan Sain, 'Green Campus Management in Islamic Higher Education : Sustainable Development Goals 13', 4.1 (2025), pp. 46–58, doi:https://doi.org/10.24036/insight.v4i1.201.

[5] Evi Aprilia Sari, 'Peran Pustakawan Ai (Artificial Intelligent) Sebagai Strategi Promosi Perpustakaan Perguruan Tinggi Di Era Revolusi 4.0', *BIBLIOTIKA : Jurnal Kajian Perpustakaan Dan Informasi*, 3.1 (2019), pp. 64–73, doi:10.17977/um008v3i12019p064.

[6] Pi-chun Hsu and Ru-si Chen, 'Analyzing the Mechanisms by Which Digital Platforms Influence Family-School Partnerships among Parents of Young Children', 2023, doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/su152416708.

[7] Jorge Reyna, 'Digital Media Assignments in Undergraduate Science Education : An Evidence-Based Approach', 29.1063519 (2021), pp. 1–19, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.25304/rlt.v29.2573.

[8] Murtadi Wulandari, Ayu and Roynaldi Arista, 'Persepsi Siswa MP Kelas X Mengenai Penggunaan Media Sosial Instagram Dalam Meningkatkan Citra SMK Sandikta', September, 2025, doi:https://doi.org/10.59841/saber.v3i4.3322.

[9] Muhamad Ibnusina, Nila Armelia, and Merek, 'The Influence Of Content Origin On Trust And Engagement : A Comparative Study Of Ai-Generated And Human-Generated Content For Indonesian Communication And Information Industry', 7 (2024), pp. 9335–49, doi:https://doi.org/10.31004/jrpp.v7i3.31016.

[10] Dasrun Hidayat, Novel Anak Lyndon, and Haryadi Mujianto, 'Dedi Mulyadi ' s Personal Branding through " Barracks " Viral Content', 10.1 (2025), pp. 97–120, doi:https://doi.org/10.24198/prh.v10i1.64028 Dedi.

Bengkulu. The visibility generated by such moments represents a form of earned media that can significantly enhance institutional reputation.[11]

Nevertheless, the school's PR officer underscores that digital visibility must be grounded in genuine institutional quality. Communication cannot substitute for substantive educational performance. This view echoes the broader argument within educational marketing scholarship that lasting competitiveness must be rooted in strong academic culture, ethical governance, and professional teaching practices.[12] Studies on quality-driven competitiveness emphasize that schools with transparent evaluation systems, consistent teacher performance, and supportive learning environments tend to build reputations that endure beyond momentary public attention.[13] The practices observed at SMA Negeri 4 such as transparent grading, disciplined character formation, and a commitment to a healthy school environment suggest that internal quality serves as the foundation upon which communication strategies succeed.

Public trust in schools has long been associated with consistency in service and user experience.[14] By maintaining accountability, openness to student feedback, and fairness in academic procedures, SMA Negeri 4 reinforces its institutional credibility. Taken together, these elements demonstrate that the school's PR strategy integrates internal quality with carefully managed digital visibility, aligning well with theories of sustainable competitive advantage.[15]

Given these considerations, the present article aims to analyze how SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong constructs institutional competitiveness through value-aligned communication, student involvement in digital content creation, and the strategic use of social media. The study contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions by offering empirical insight into PR practices within public secondary schools in non-urban Indonesian contexts, an area that remains underexplored despite rapidly changing communication demands.

[11] Mohammad Herli and Bambang Tjahjadi, 'The Role of Social Media as a Voluntary Intellectual Capital Disclosure in Universities : Evidence from Indonesia', 18.2 (2022), pp. 247–62, doi:https://doi.org/10.3926/ic.1505.

[12] Izzatul Munawwaroh and others, 'Optimizing Press Agentry for Strategic Visibility in Educational Based on Pesantren', 6.2 (2024), pp. 119–34, doi:https://doi.org/10.35719/jieman.v6i2.258.

[13] Nasron Hakim and Bambang Wahrudin, 'Peningkatan Daya Saing Melalui Manajemen Strategi Fungsional Di SMA Bakti Ponorogo', 03.01 (2023), pp. 153–67, doi:10.38073/aljadwa.v3i1.1825.

[14] Bilal Hassan, 'Quality of Schooling and Political Trust among Students', June, 2025, pp. 1–9, doi:10.3389/fpos.2025.1389088.

[15] Ridwan Abdullah and others, 'Humas Dan Media Sosial Sebagai Seni Membangun Reputasi Sekolah Di Era Post Truth : Systematic Literature Review', 07.02 (2025), pp. 9029–39, doi:https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v7i2.7815.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong organizes and carries out its public relations (PR) efforts as part of its strategy to strengthen school competitiveness. This design was chosen because the research aimed to capture the perspectives, routines, and communication practices that naturally occur within the school environment. Instead of treating the variables numerically, the study sought to understand them as lived and interpreted by the individuals directly involved. In this research, the idea of a PR strategy was conceptualized as the school's systematic efforts to communicate its identity, cultivate trust, and maintain a positive public image.[16] Operationally, it was examined through concrete activities such as digital postings, documentation practices, stakeholder participation, and the school's adherence to its institutional values. The concept of competitiveness referred to the school's capacity to remain visible, trusted, and preferred within the local educational landscape. Operational indicators included community responses, engagement on digital platforms, and internal quality practices like fairness, discipline, and academic culture.[17]

The key participant in this research was the Vice Principal who oversees public relations, selected purposively due to his central role in designing and monitoring communication activities. Additional insights were drawn from teachers who assist in documentation and from members of the student council who routinely help prepare and disseminate digital content. The corpus of the study encompassed school publications, communication outputs, digital archives, and social media posts produced over a two-year period.[18]

Data were gathered through three interconnected techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of planning routines, decision-making processes, and the rationale behind specific communication choices. Second, direct observations were made during school events to see how documentation was carried out, how communication materials were constructed, and how students engaged in content-production tasks. Third, the research employed document and media analysis by reviewing school policies, promotional materials, video recordings, still images, and social media uploads.[19]

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[16] Muhammad Randicha Hamandia, 'Kekuatan Komunikasi : Strategi Public Relations Dalam Membangun School Branding Pada SDIT Al-Furqon Palembang', 2.1 (2025), pp. 1–13, doi:https://doi.org/10.47134/converse.v2i1.4805.

[17] Elena Tikhonova, Marina Kosycheva, and Petr Kasatkin, 'Exploring Academic Culture : Unpacking Its Definition and Structure (A Systematic Scoping Review)', 9.4 (2023), doi:JOURhttps://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2023.18491.

[18] Lantip. Lia Prasojo, Yuliana, 'How Is Social Media Used By Indonesian School Principals For Instructional Leadership?', 40.1 (2021), pp. 70–80, doi:10.21831/cp.v40i1.32925.

[19] Agus Setyo, Hakkun Elmunsyah, and Ari Eka Prasetiyanto, 'Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek Di Media Sosial: Strategi Peningkatan Motivasi Dan Semangat Belajar Siswa Sekolah Kejuruan', 10.1 (2024), pp. 471–79, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.30998/rdje.v10i1.23341.

For analysis, the study followed Miles and Huberman's interactive framework, moving back and forth between reducing data, organizing it into thematic displays, and interpreting emerging patterns. Coding was applied to interview transcripts and observation notes, while cross-checking among multiple sources served to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that public relations (PR) at SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong is not merely an administrative tool for disseminating information but a comprehensive, value-oriented communication practice embedded within the school's identity. Data from interviews, observations, and document reviews consistently show that the school's PR strategy is intentionally synchronized with its core institutional values excellence, religiosity, and environmental consciousness which collectively shape how the school presents itself to internal and external stakeholders. The Vice Principal for Public Relations repeatedly emphasized that every piece of content released to the public must reflect the school's ethical and cultural foundation. He explained that communication is not to be understood simply as posting updates or showcasing achievements but as a medium for projecting the school's moral character and educational mission. This perspective is further supported by observational data indicating that every photo, video, and announcement undergoes a careful internal screening process to ensure alignment with expected school norms, such as modest student attire, clean school environments, and respectful behavior during activities. The fidelity of content to institutional values demonstrates how deeply the PR function is woven into the school's cultural fabric, serving as a guardian of image and identity.[20]

The school's strategic use of digital media emerges as another dominant theme. SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong actively cultivates a robust presence on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube, recognizing these platforms as vital extensions of the modern school environment. Analysis of posts from 2023 to 2025 indicates that the school consistently uploads content that documents academic events, competitions, religious practices, environmental initiatives, and student life. Observations show that during school events, student council members equipped with mobile devices circulate freely across school spaces, capturing candid moments for potential publication. Despite the seemingly spontaneous nature of the content, further inquiry reveals that the workflow is highly structured: raw documentation is collected by the student team, reviewed by teachers, and ultimately approved by the PR Vice Principal before publication. This multi-layered process constructs a digital persona that appears lively

[20] Helen O Sullivan and others, 'Contemporary Branding Strategies for Higher Education', 2024, pp. 1292–1311, doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/ encyclopedia4030085.

and organic while retaining institutional coherence. Engagement metricssuch as likes, comments, and sharessuggest that this visibility strategy successfully resonates with the school community and broader audiences, contributing to the perception that SMA Negeri 4 is an active, modern, and competitive institution.[21]

Student participation plays a pivotal role in shaping the authenticity of the school's communication outputs. The school consciously appoints members of the student council, particularly those in the media division, to become content creators who assist in producing and editing visual material. Interviews reveal that this involvement is based on the understanding that students possess an intuitive grasp of what their peers find engaging online, thus increasing the probability of higher engagement and broader reach. The PR Vice Principal noted that students' content "feels more natural," highlighting the value of youth-generated material in constructing a relatable narrative. Observational data confirm that student-produced content often incorporates humor, creative transitions, and informal expressions absent from teacher-generated posts. This stylistic distinction leads to notable differences in audience engagement, with student-created videos and photos consistently attracting more interaction. The findings illustrate that peer-to-peer communication serves as a powerful amplification mechanism, enabling school messages to circulate more widely through students' personal social networks.[22]

One of the most striking findings concerns the unexpected virality of a farewell video created by students during a graduation ceremony. Unlike highly produced promotional materials, the video consists of simple footage showing students walking through the school grounds, exchanging hugs, and expressing gratitude. The emotional tone of the video resonated strongly with audiences, resulting in rapid circulation across TikTok and Instagram. Its prominence increased when the Governor of Bengkulu reposted the content, exposing it to a significantly wider audience. The PR Vice Principal admitted that the viral outcome was unplanned but attributed its success to raw emotional sincerity, which aligns with theoretical perspectives suggesting that emotionally charged narratives travel farther than informational messages. Analysis of public comments reveals overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the school's atmosphere, reinforcing the idea that viral emotional content can shape institutional reputation in ways that formal communication cannot. The phenomenon stands as a clear example of earned media positive exposure generated without financial

[21] Emi Masruroh, Shafa Mf, and Uswatun Hasanah, 'Transforming Educational Marketing in the Digital Era : Strategies for Utilizing Social Media to Increase the Competitiveness of Secondary Education Institutions', 04.02 (2023), pp. 109–20, doi:https://doi.org/10.33650/jumpa.v4i2.9280.

[22] Arunkumar Sivakumar and Sudarsan Jayasingh, 'Education Sciences Social Media Influence on Students ' Knowledge Sharing and Learning : An Empirical Study', 2023, doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13070745.

investment which significantly boosts the school's visibility and enhances its legitimacy in the public eye.[23]

Despite the importance of digital communication, the findings make clear that the school's PR strength is rooted in its internal culture. Transparency, discipline, religious habituation, and supportive teacher–student relationships collectively form the backbone of the school's credibility. Interviews with the PR Vice Principal highlight the belief that promotional efforts are meaningless if not supported by genuine institutional quality. Observational evidence supports this claim: teachers openly communicate grading systems, explain evaluation criteria, and allow students to question unclear results. Daily routines such as morning assembly checks, uniform inspections, and cleanliness patrols demonstrate an emphasis on order and discipline. Religious practices, including collective prayers and Qur'an reading sessions, are integrated into daily activities, reinforcing the school's moral vision. Informal conversations with students further reveal that many perceive their teachers as approachable and fair, contributing to a positive learning environment that strengthens internal trust. These internal practices generate authentic content that is naturally suitable for digital publication, blurring the line between internal culture and external communication.[24]

Public responses collected from comment sections, parent testimonials, and community feedback further validate the positive impact of the school's PR strategy. Parents appreciate the transparency afforded by frequent updates. Alumni frequently share school content, expressing pride and nostalgia. Local government stakeholders occasionally interact with the school's posts, indicating recognition of its proactive communication style. During admission periods, parents have reported that the consistency and professionalism of the school's social media presence influence their decision to enroll their children. These responses demonstrate that the school's PR practices directly contribute to shaping public perception, trust, and competitiveness. The widespread recognition of the school's digital profile is not only a byproduct of aesthetic presentation but a reflection of the school's long-term cultivation of credibility and relational engagement.[25]

Altogether, the findings portray SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong as an institution whose PR strategy is not restricted to digital promotion but reflects a broad synergy between institutional values, internal culture, and digital engagement. The school's approach reveals a layered communication model in which values guide messages,

[23] Charitha Harshani Perera, Rajkishore Nayak, and Long Thang Van Nguyen, 'The Impact of Social Media Marketing and Brand Credibility on Higher Education Institutes ' Brand Equity in Emerging Countries', *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 29.8 (2023), pp. 770–95, doi:10.1080/13527266.2022.2086284.

[24] Ashlyee Freeman and Özgecan Koçak, 'Designing Inclusive Organizational Identities', *Journal of Organization Design*, 2023, pp. 177–93, doi:10.1007/s41469-023-00150-0.

[25] Agus Maimun Sawji Bekti, 'Jurnal Kependidikan':, 10.4 (2024), pp. 1709–21, doi:https://doi.org/10.33394/jk.v10i4.13489.

internal quality generates authentic content, students amplify narratives through peer networks, and digital platforms function as public stages for identity construction. This comprehensive integration allows the school to maintain visibility, cultivate trust, and strengthen its competitive standing in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

The analysis of the data indicates that public relations (PR) at SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong operates far beyond the simple function of distributing information to the public. Rather than serving as an auxiliary unit responsible for routine announcements, PR in this school represents a carefully structured communication framework that grows out of the school's ethos, daily behavior patterns, and long-standing institutional commitments. This section interprets those findings by positioning them within broader discussions in communication studies, educational leadership, and youth digital cultures. When viewed through these scholarly lenses, the school's practices not only reinforce existing theories but also offer nuances that expand the current understanding of PR within educational settings.

A significant pattern that emerges from the findings concerns the way the school deliberately anchors its communication in its institutional values. SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong consistently ties every communicative act whether a photograph, a caption, or a video to its guiding ideals of academic excellence, religious formation, and environmental awareness. This practice resonates with scholarly arguments suggesting that reputation is most durable when an organization's outward messaging is a faithful extension of its internal character.[26] Hallahan's observation that strategic communication must rest on a coherent identity, is clearly illustrated here: the school treats communication not merely as a technical output but as a channel through which it reiterates its character. [27] This is consistent with prior research showing that educational institutions with stable value-based messaging tend to be perceived more credibly by their communities than those that rely on promotional tones that are disconnected from institutional life.[28]

The findings also affirm the growing consensus that contemporary PR in education has shifted into a digitally oriented enterprise. Most previous studies note that schools now depend heavily on social media platforms to cultivate visibility,

[26] Frauke Sander and others, 'Act as You Preach ! Authentic Brand Purpose versus " Woke Washing ' s " Impact on Brand Credibility : The Moderating Role of Cause Involvement and Consumer Skepticism', 184.July (2024), doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114868.

[27] Sanna Ala-kortesmaa, Tomi Laapotti, and Leena Mikkola, 'Narrative Start-up Identity Construction as Strategic Communication Narrative Start-up Identity Construction as Strategic', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 16.2 (2022), pp. 222–38, doi:10.1080/1553118X.2022.2027772.

[28] Abdel Afu Ansari and Rida Abu Dalu, 'Organizational Communication Competence of Public Secondary School Principals through Utilizing WhatsApp', May, 2024, pp. 1–13, doi:10.3389/feduc.2024.1374279.

manage relationships, and maintain relevance.[29] The behavior of SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong aligns fully with this trend. Its digital ecosystem spanning Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube acts not as a peripheral channel but as a primary extension of the school's identity. The internal mechanism used to produce digital materials, where students gather footage, teachers refine it, and the PR unit provides final authorization, reflects a communication structure in which spontaneity and control coexist. This workflow echoes contemporary research on digital media which shows that seemingly "natural" online content is frequently the result of intentional curation.[30] Yet, and this is crucial, such curation is not deceptive. It mirrors the conclusion of media scholars who argue that authenticity in digital spaces is rarely synonymous with unfiltered content; instead, it is shaped by purposeful selection that still reflects lived reality.[31]

The role of students as active contributors to the school's digital storytelling provides another noteworthy dimension. Rather than positioning young people merely as the subjects of its content, the school engages them as creators. This is consistent with the evolving theory of participatory communication, which proposes that modern organizational narratives are strongest when stakeholders collaboratively generate messages.[32] The school's choice to rely on students particularly those in the student council's media division reflects a conscious acknowledgment of their intuitive understanding of digital aesthetics and youth preferences. This trend mirrors Jenkins's concept of *participatory culture*, where audiences become co-authors of messages.[33] In practice, this helps explain why the school's digital personality feels vibrant and relatable. Student-generated materials often carry tones, rhythms, and visual styles distinct from teacher-produced content, and this difference tends to draw higher engagement. The findings therefore support the argument that PR in schools can benefit from decentralizing narrative ownership, allowing young people to shape how their school is perceived online.

The unexpected virality of the farewell video provides compelling evidence of how emotionally resonant content can transform school communication. The video's reach eventually being reposted by the Governor of Bengkulu demonstrates what PR

[29] Sanjay Krishnapratap Pawar, 'Social Media in Higher Education Marketing: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda', *Cogent Business and Management*, 11.1 (2024), p., doi:10.1080/23311975.2024.2423059.

[30] Hannah Metzler, 'Social Drivers and Algorithmic Mechanisms on Digital Media', 2024, doi:10.1177/17456916231185057.

[31] Muchlis Abbas and Taufik Thahir, 'Pengaruh Kualitas Konten Digital , Personalisasi Iklan Digital , Dan Influencer Marketing Terhadap Kepercayaan Konsumen Generasi Z Pada Produk Digital Di Kalangan Mahasiswa Kota Makassar Abstrak Pendahuluan', 8.4 (2025), pp. 968–78, doi:10.57178/paradoks.v8i4.1948.

[32] Kirsi Aaltonen and others, 'International Journal of Project Management Stakeholder Engagement : Theoretical and Methodological Directions for Project Scholarship', *International Journal of Project Management*, 42.7 (2024), p. 102649, doi:10.1016/j.ijproman.2024.102649.

[33] Novita Nur Cahyanti and others, 'Digital Storytelling Media to Improve Students ' Speaking Skills in Elementary School', 7.2 (2023), pp. 261–68.

theory calls *earned media*, where publicity arises organically without deliberate campaigning. [34] Emotional narrative research has long indicated that stories emphasizing human connection, nostalgia, or gratitude are statistically more likely to be shared widely.[35] The simplicity of the video, which featured raw student expressions rather than formal staging, illustrates this principle vividly. Instead of relying on high-budget production elements, the moment's sincerity appealed to viewers and prompted large-scale sharing. SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong's experience here challenges the assumption that institutional visibility requires sophisticated branding; sometimes, unpolished authenticity exerts far greater influence. This case echoes the perspective of scholars who highlight that, in the digital era, emotional resonance can outperform technical refinement in attracting public attention.[36]

Equally important is the study's indication that the school's PR strength stems from internal credibility rather than digital strategy alone. Transparency in assessment practices, consistent discipline, daily religious routines, and supportive relationships between teachers and students form the cultural backbone of the institution. These behavioral norms not only strengthen internal trust but also supply naturally compelling material for external communication. Sallis's idea of quality-driven competitiveness offers a useful interpretive lens here: the school's communication succeeds because it reflects actual institutional quality. [37] This finding aligns with earlier research emphasizing that promotional narratives lacking substantive institutional grounding often fail to persuade audiences.[38] SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong demonstrates the opposite pattern digital representation works precisely because it is rooted in observable everyday practices. This supports a relational understanding of communication: institutions are believed not because of what they claim but because of what they can consistently demonstrate.

Reactions from parents, alumni, and local officials also affirm the presence of a reputation-building cycle. In this cycle, sustained communication fosters engagement,

[34] Muhammad Dimas Prasetya and others, 'The Evolution of Social Media Marketing : A Comprehensive Systematic Review of Current Trends , Challenges , and Future Insights', 8.2 (2025), pp. 103–26, doi:https://doi.org/10.24036/jptk.v8i2.44323.

[35] Susannah B F Paletz and others, 'Emotional Content and Sharing on Facebook : A Theory Cage Match', 9231 (2023), pp. 1–12.

[36] Yolanda Masnita Putri Martina, 'Pengaruh Sosial Media, Cognitive Engagement Dan Emotional Engagement Yang Dimediasi Oleh Brand Experience Terhadap Brand Loyalty', 10.16 (2024), pp. 683–706, doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13765579.

[37] Wulan Roudhotul Nasikhah, 'Quality Assurance Strategy in Maintaining School Integrity and Community Trust to Strengthen the Foundations of Education Quality', 12.2 (2024), pp. 17–26, doi:https://doi.org/10.21831/jamp.v12i2.73542.

[38] Bernhard Clemm Von Hohenberg, 'When Do Sources Persuade ? The Effect of Source Credibility on Opinion Change', 2023, pp. 328–42, doi:10.1017/XPS.2022.2.

and engagement subsequently strengthens legitimacy.[39] The fact that families consult the school's social media platforms during admission seasons corresponds with broader research that digital visibility increasingly influences educational decision-making. The school's experience shows that even institutions in smaller regions can extend their competitive reach through consistent, well-aligned communication strategies [40].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that the effectiveness of public relations at SMA Negeri 4 Rejang Lebong is not primarily determined by the intensity of digital promotion, but by the school's ability to build communication that is firmly rooted in its values, culture, and everyday experiences. Public relations function as a bridge that connects institutional identity with the digital sphere, allowing the image presented online to reflect the school's internal realities authentically. Student involvement in content creation plays a crucial role in generating sincerity and strengthening public trust, making the school's narrative more relatable and meaningful. Ultimately, this study confirms that sustainable educational reputation in the digital era emerges from the alignment of internal values, community participation, and honest, value-driven communication practices.

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