

The Strategic Frameworks in Digital Marketing Communication for Educational Institutions: A Case Analysis of Universitas Islam Negeri in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

In the ever evolving and highly competitive business landscape, the image of an organization, particularly in the realm of higher education, plays a pivotal role. This article proposes a strategic framework for digital marketing communication within educational institutions, with a case analysis drawn from Universitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi. We delve into the significant impact of information technology and the internet, reshaping communication paradigms on a global scale. Emphasizing the critical importance of a university's image in shaping societal perceptions and influencing educational choices, we explore the concept of brand image in the context of education. Detailing digital marketing strategies as a solution to enhance visibility, appeal, and the reputation of higher education institutions, this article elucidates how technological innovations and digital platforms serve as effective means for universities to connect with a broader audience, including prospective students, alumni, and potential partners. Through a case study analysis, we underscore the pivotal role of digital marketing in building and fortifying a positive image, as well as addressing potential reputation issues. The outcomes of this research provide strategic insights for universities to implement effective digital marketing communication, guiding them towards achieving their goals in this digital era.

Keywords: Higher Education Strategic, Digital Marketing Communication, Public Relation, University of Islam

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving and intensely competitive business landscape, the image of a company or organization holds paramount significance. The advent of information technology and the internet has brought about profound impacts across various sectors, including higher education. The internet, developed towards the end of the 20th century, has given rise to a new industry, transforming social structures, business cultures, and even individual attitudes due to the widespread use of this medium. Communication facilitated through the internet has turned the world into a global village, overcoming physical distances through continuous communication via websites, emails, internet phones, and, more recently, social media, enabling two-way communication between producers and consumers. In the digital era,

universities worldwide need to leverage effective digital marketing communication strategies to enhance their visibility, appeal, and reputation. Various technological innovations and digital platforms have enabled higher education institutions to reach a broader audience and establish closer connections with prospective students, alumni, and potential partners. The concept of brand image in the educational domain, as described in the International Conference on Research in Education and Science (Shelley and Akcay, 2021), underscores its significance in influencing the decisions of parents regarding their children's school choices and fostering trust and loyalty among the community towards educational institutions.

Digital marketing opens opportunities for university brand development. Digital marketing, defined as the practice of promoting products and services through digital distribution channels using computers, mobile phones, smartphones, or other digital devices (Smith, 2012), involves efforts to build strong relationships between organizations and mass media. This includes providing quality information, fostering connections with journalists and media editors, and promptly and accurately responding to media requests. In this context, digital marketing strategies aim to build a positive image and strengthen the organization's reputation in the eyes of the public. Through positive interactions with the media, companies or organizations can obtain accurate and favorable coverage of their activities, thereby enhancing brand awareness and a positive image among the general audience. Moreover, digital marketing strategies play a crucial role in addressing potentially damaging reputation issues. In the current digital era, digital marketing strategies also encompass the use of social media and other online platforms. Over the past few years, significant research has focused on digital marketing as it remains a subject of ongoing relevance (Rodrigues and Martinez, 2020). Companies or organizations can leverage social media to interact directly with their audience and garner public support. In this context, digital marketing also helps enhance customer trust and loyalty. On a global scale, digital marketing is vital for gaining recognition and reputation internationally. Through international media coverage, companies or organizations can achieve global recognition and enhance their competitiveness in international markets.

The growth of internet users in Indonesia, as indicated by the survey conducted by the Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers in 2017, reached 143.26 million people, representing an increase from the previous year's figure of 132.7 million people in 2016. The survey also highlighted that information-seeking behavior in purchasing decisions ranked among the top three internet user behaviors in the economic sector, accounting for 37.82% (Kominfo, 2017). Digital marketing strategy is equally essential for universities. As institutions of higher education, universities rely heavily on their reputation to attract new students, secure funding and support, and attract qualified academic staff. By implementing effective digital marketing strategies, universities can enhance their positive image in the eyes of the public, thereby improving their competitiveness in attracting new students, funding and support, as well as qualified academic staff. This is also true for Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, which has adapted to the advancements in digital technology to communicate effectively with its entire audience. In the realm of university public relations, practitioners play a pivotal role as a conduit for the inflow and outflow of all forms of information for both internal and external stakeholders.

Public relations efforts involve conveying messages, disseminating news and information related to university activities, and facilitating communication within the university. Communication aids marketing practitioners in reaching their target audience efficiently (Hellemans, Willems, and Brengman, 2020). Public relations at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin uses internal media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook,

Tiktok and the website. These platforms are integral for public relations in conveying messages and information related to the university to external audiences. Social media is widely used for marketing applications, including advertising, public relations, branding, and customer management. Understanding the factors influencing the information adoption process on social media is essential.

Internally, public relations is tasked with effectively communicating the university's performance or elaborating further on the organization's strategic goals. Vision, mission, and values proclaimed by the executive head must be communicated clearly. The effectiveness of an organization/university is determined by the information system flow and the efficiency of the information flow that can provide quality information accessible to all. Thus, communication is not only about conveying messages regarding the university's vision, goals, or targets but also eliciting curiosity or, at the very least, agreement/support from internal stakeholders regarding those goals. Public relations, utilizing digital media as an information medium for the public, holds a pivotal role in shaping and maintaining a positive image of the university.

The function, role, and position of the Public Relations Office at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin fall under the leadership/direct relationship with the highest decision-maker, namely the Corporate Secretary (University Secretary). Therefore, the role of Public Relations at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin is vital. As a component of the university that plays a crucial role, Public Relations at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin has optimal roles and responsibilities. To optimize their roles and responsibilities, Public Relations at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin uses digital media to disseminate internal university information. This information can include university profiles, planned work programs, policy and product socialization, directives, seminar or training socializations, organizing essay competitions related to the university, and various other university activities. The website, Instagram, and Facebook are the most frequently used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research explores various digital marketing communication strategies in the higher education context through a literature review. Several previous studies provide valuable insights regarding the opportunities and challenges in implementing digital marketing strategies at universities. For example, in 2013, Rubaiyet (2013) investigated social media strategies at higher education institutions in New Zealand. The study found that there is clear consumer demand for social media as a marketing channel, but educational institutions are underutilizing it due to a lack of trust and commitment. In 2019, research by Camilleri (2019) showed that higher education institutions need to utilize strategic marketing communication channels to promote their educational services and achieve competitive advantage in the global market.

Another study by Bonilla et al. (2019) highlighted the strategy of Instagram presence in higher education institutions as an effort to meet marketing needs in the social networking space inhabited by the university's target audience. Furthermore, Al-Thagafi et al. (2019) found that the Capability Maturity Model (CMM) can help higher education institutions overcome digital marketing challenges in international student recruitment, with a focus on standing out competitively in the global marketplace. Lastly, research by Moment et al. (2019) responded to the need for an integrated approach with the inclusion of effective web-based communication tools, considering primary service recipient responses. These studies provide an in-depth

understanding of the dynamics of digital marketing in higher education, including the barriers faced and strategies successfully implemented by other institutions. It is hoped that this research can make a significant contribution to the development of more effective digital marketing strategies in the higher education context.

New Media Theory

Digital Marketing Communication Strategy in Higher Education can refer to the application of New Media theory in the context of digital marketing in the field of higher education. New Media Theory is a term used for various communication technologies with digitalization and their wide availability for personal use as a communication tool (McQuail 2011).

The application of New Media theory in higher education digital marketing strategies can provide great benefits. New media focuses not only on technology, but also on related cultural, social and political aspects. New media changes the traditional communication paradigm centered on media production and consumption into a more inclusive and collaborative paradigm. Jenkins calls this phenomenon a "convergence culture," where the boundaries between producers and consumers are increasingly blurred, and society has an active role in creating, sharing, and interpreting media content. First, through digital media, universities can reach a wider and more diverse audience, both at home and abroad. Digital platforms such as social media, websites, and e-learning platforms enable universities to promote their study programs, facilities, and academic activities to potential students worldwide.

Computer Mediated Communication

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is a form of communication that occurs through computers or digital technology. In his research, Walther studies various aspects of CMC, including social interactions, interpersonal relationships, and the dynamics of online communication. Strategic Digital Marketing Communication in Higher Education involves the use of computer-based communication (CMC) as the main means of connecting higher education institutions with prospective students and other stakeholders. CMC refers to the interactions and exchange of information that occur through digital platforms such as websites, social media, email, and instant messaging applications.

In the context of higher education, implementing CMC in digital marketing strategies can provide several significant benefits (Marani et al., 2020). First, CMC enables higher education institutions to reach a broader and more geographically diverse audience. With the digital platform, information about study programs, campus activities and academic achievements can be easily accessed by prospective students from various regions or countries. CMC enables higher education institutions to interact directly with prospective students and other stakeholders. Through features such as live chat, comments, and feedback via social media, institutions can answer questions, provide additional information, and build closer relationships with prospective students.

Public Relations

Public relations (PR) is strategic communications process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their stakeholders. It involves the use of various communication techniques, such as media relations, public relations, crisis management, and internal communications, to create and maintain a positive image and reputation for an organization. In the context of (Stephen W. Littlejohn & Karen A. Foss 2018), PR is considered a communication theory that focuses on the strategic management of communication between organizations and their publics.

Communication

Communication is the process of conveying a message by someone to another person to inform or change attitudes, opinions, or behavior either verbally or indirectly through the media, in digital marketing communication is the process of interaction between a company or organization and social media and websites to convey messages and information to the public.

Crisis Communication

In today's digital era, crisis communication needs to be multichannel and responsive (Coombs and Holladay 2022). This requires organizations to consider the use of social media and the latest technology in managing messaging and reputation during a crisis. Critical communication in the university's digital marketing communication strategy refers to the ability to carry out critical analysis of the messages and strategies used within the university.

Technology dan Digitalization

Technology and digitalization have an important role in digital marketing communication strategies in university public relations. The digital technologies that individuals possess often extend beyond the individual themselves, by establishing relationships with other individuals in their social environment, ranging from family and close friends, colleagues at work, to others with weak ties, and strangers. Digital technology is not only used for communication, but also to build various types of social ties with other individuals by sharing and exchanging data using digital channels (Matt et al. 2019).

RESEARCH METHOD

In implementing data validity, inspection techniques are needed, which are based on certain criteria. According to (Moleong 2007), "there are four criteria used, namely the degree of trust (Credibility), expertise (Transferability), dependency (Dependability), and certainty (Confirmability)". Furthermore, one of the four criteria used is to check the validity of the data, namely "Credibility", because with one of these criteria the researcher hopes that the data obtained can be used as a benchmark to guarantee the validity of the data obtained in the research. There is triangulation of sources, triangulation of data collection techniques, and time (Sugiyono 2018).

1. Source Triangulation To test the credibility of the data, this is done by checking data that has been obtained through several sources. The data obtained was analyzed by researchers to produce a conclusion, then agreement (member check) was requested with three data sources (Sugiyono 2018).
2. Technical Triangulation To test the credibility of the data, this is done by checking the data against the same source with different techniques. For example, to check data through interviews, observation, documentation (Sugiyono, 2018).
3. Time Triangulation Data collected using interview techniques in the morning when the sources are still fresh, will provide more valid data and therefore more credible. This can then be done by checking with interviews, observation or other techniques in different times or situations. If the test results produce different data, it is carried out repeatedly until certainty in the data is found (Sugiyono 2018)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of digital marketing strategies at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi is a systematic process aimed at enhancing the university's image, fostering economic growth, and increasing student enrollments. The Public Relations (PR) team meticulously applies a multi-layered approach, beginning with the maintenance of an active presence on various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok and Website. Regular content updates, showcasing university activities, achievements of students and faculty, and other essential information, play a crucial role in this strategy to interact with diverse audiences, including prospective students, current students, alumni, and potential partners. Simultaneously, the team ensures the optimization of the university's official website, turning it into a user-friendly information hub. This involves providing accurate and up-to-date data regarding academic programs, admission procedures, and upcoming university events. The creation of engaging content, marked by the use of attractive graphics and informative posts, facilitates effective interaction with the target audience, making a significant contribution to the success of the digital marketing initiatives.

Active participation in online communities, coupled with prompt responses to inquiries and engagement in discussions, plays a key role in building positive relationships and meeting the needs of the audience in real-time. Through these efforts, the university has successfully shaped and maintained a positive image, building trust among the community through various digital channels. Targeted digital marketing campaigns, especially those launched on social media, showcase the university's excellence and achievements, enhancing its visibility and attracting specific audiences.

Concurrently, strategic collaborations with external stakeholders are also highlighted digitally, reaffirming the university's commitment to academic excellence and positive contributions to society. In the culmination of these efforts, research results reinforce the success of the Public Relations team in contributing to the university's positive image, increasing attractiveness to prospective students, securing successful financial support, and attracting qualified academic staff. This underscores the importance of adapting to digital trends, optimal utilization of online platforms, and sustained efforts to strengthen engagement with various stakeholders. This strategy not only creates positive changes in the university's image but also opens avenues for sustainable economic growth and a significant increase in student enrollments.



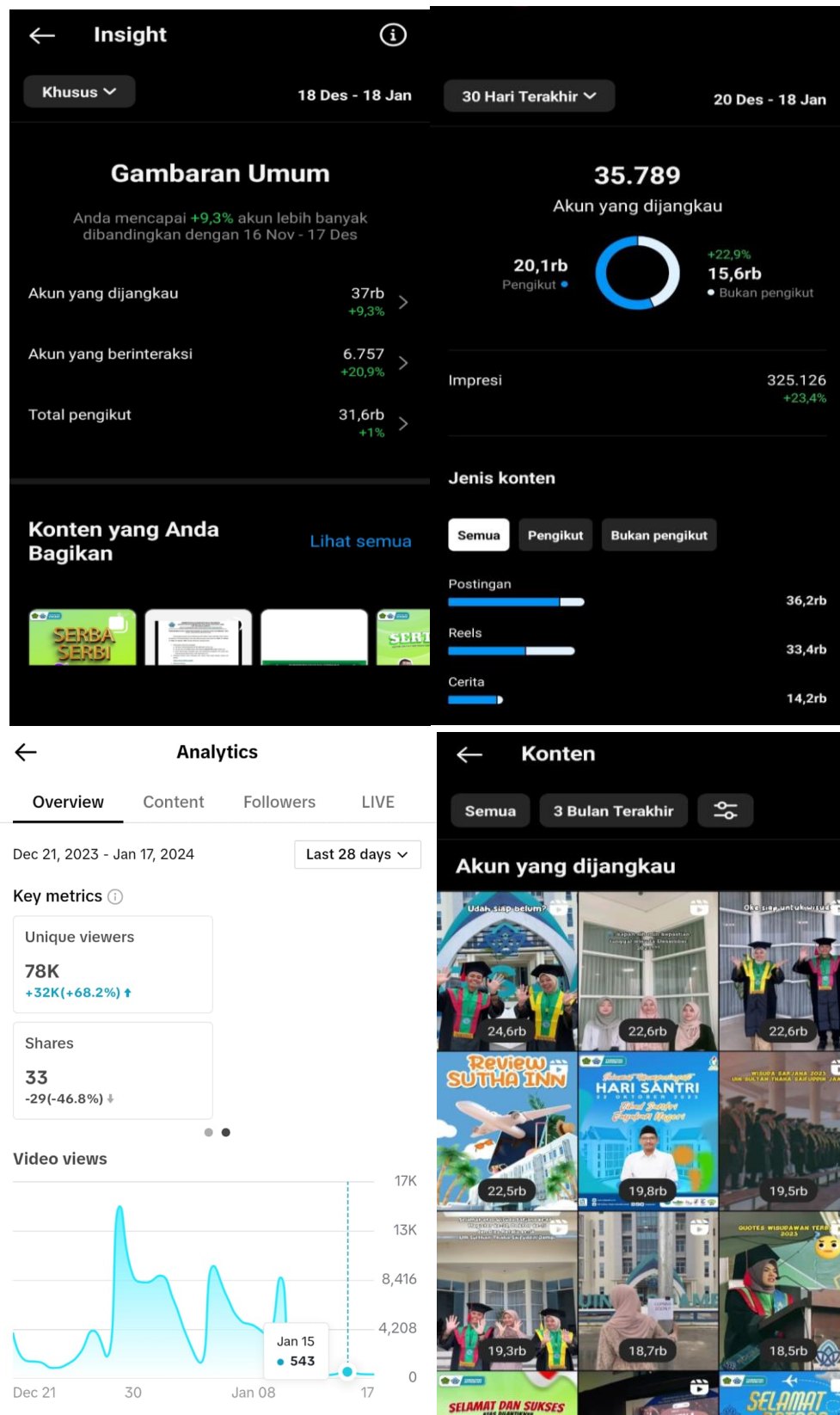


Figure 1: Insight media sosial dan tampilan website UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi

The implementation of digital marketing strategies by the Public Relations (PR) team at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi presents several opportunities and challenges that require special attention. One major opportunity is the potential for global outreach facilitated by digital marketing strategies using online platforms to reach prospective students, potential partners, and the international community, effectively increasing the university's visibility on a global scale.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to establish strategic collaborations with external entities, such as industries and research institutions, through digital media, providing positive benefits in supporting the university's academic and research activities. Active interaction with the audience also presents an opportunity to build engagement and positive relationships through prompt responses to feedback and participation in discussions. However, there are several challenges that need to be addressed. Online reputation management is one of these challenges, with the potential for negative responses or the spread of inaccurate information that could adversely impact the university's image.

Data security is also a concern, given that the use of digital media increases risks related to the privacy and security of student information and internal university data. Another challenge is the rapid changes in digital technology trends, demanding sustainability in adapting and innovating marketing strategies. The dependence on specific social media platforms and maintaining the integrity of information are also aspects that need attention. Therefore, the PR team needs to be wise in managing and leveraging opportunities while overcoming these challenges to ensure the success of digital marketing strategies and achieve the university's goals in enhancing its image, fostering economic growth, and increasing student enrollments.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the implementation of digital marketing strategies by the Public Relations (PR) team at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi has proven to be a comprehensive and effective approach in enhancing the university's image and increasing student enrollments. The meticulous application of a multi-layered strategy, including active engagement on social media platforms and regular updates on university activities, has successfully reached diverse audiences, including prospective students, current students, alumni, and potential partners. The optimization of the university's official website further contributes to user-friendly access to accurate and up-to-date information. Active participation in online communities, rapid responses to inquiries, and engagement in discussions have played a pivotal role in building positive relationships and maintaining a favorable image in the digital landscape. Targeted digital marketing campaigns have showcased the university's excellence, leading to increased visibility and attracting specific audiences.

Strategic collaborations with external stakeholders, emphasized digitally, underscore the commitment to academic excellence and positive contributions to society. Research results affirm the success of the PR team in contributing to the university's positive image, attracting prospective students, securing financial support, and drawing qualified academic staff. This underscores the importance of adaptability to digital trends, optimal use of online platforms, and sustained efforts to strengthen engagement with various stakeholders. Overall, this strategy not only brings about positive changes in the university's image but also paves the way

for sustainable economic growth and a significant increase in student enrollments. However, as with any successful initiative, there are challenges to address. Online reputation management, data security, and the ever-evolving landscape of digital technology trends pose ongoing challenges. The PR team must remain vigilant in addressing these issues to ensure the continued success of digital marketing strategies. In navigating these opportunities and challenges, the PR team's wisdom in managing and leveraging digital platforms will be crucial for achieving the university's overarching goals of enhancing its image, fostering economic growth, and increasing student enrollments.

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