

Social Media-Based Public Relations Strategy in the Development of Nurul Jadid Vocational School to Increase Student Participation

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Abstract

This paper examines social media-based public relations strategies in the development of SMK Nurul Jadid to increase student participation. Driven by the challenges of low enrollment and lack of school visibility, this paper aims to analyze the implementation of public relations strategies through digital platforms, their impact on increasing student enrollment, and the role of social media in enhancing student engagement. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with school officials, participant observation of the school's social media activity, and social media content analysis. The results indicate that SMK Nurul Jadid utilizes Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to build a positive image, attract prospective students, and collaborate with stakeholders. Published content focuses on school activities, student achievements, and available facilities. However, this paper identifies challenges in consistent content creation due to limited resources. The implications of this paper emphasize the importance of a structured social media management program, training the management team, using alumni testimonials, and regular evaluations. This paper concludes that social media-based public relations strategies have significant potential to increase student participation and strengthen the school's branding, but require more structured and consistent management.

Keywords

Public Relations, Social Media, Communication Strategy, Student Participation, School Image



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INTRODUCTION

Public relations has the task of assisting and maintaining the bond between an institution and its community or public. As far as it concerns communication activities, understanding, comprehension, and cooperation in carrying out its

functions, public relations involves management in problem solving, participates in responding to public opinion, and assists management in dealing effectively with the institution, and carries out healthy communication. This definition was put forward by Rex Harlow.(Rifa'i & Hamida, 2022).

Vocational education, especially at the Vocational High School (SMK) level, has a very important role in preparing skilled workers to support the industrial sector and the business world.(YasdinYasdin et al., 2023)In Indonesia, vocational schools (SMK) are expected to produce graduates who are work-ready and possess competencies aligned with market needs. One institution facing several obstacles in its development and increasing student participation is SMK Nurul Jadid, which is under the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School Foundation. Despite its educational quality comparable to other educational institutions, SMK Nurul Jadid faces various challenges that hinder its optimal development.

One of the main challenges faced is the limited number of enrolled students, which is significantly lower than other educational institutions under the same foundation. This phenomenon indicates difficulties in attracting students to continue their education at SMK Nurul Jadid, even though the school offers equal, if not better, quality education compared to other schools. This limited number of students results in less than optimal utilization of school facilities.(Ohindase et al., 2024)Many classrooms are unused, reflecting problems in utilizing existing school capacity. Furthermore, the number of new student enrollments at SMK Nurul Jadid tends to be low each year, indicating a problem with ineffective marketing and promotion strategies. Finally, despite the school's good academic and non-academic achievements, SMK Nurul Jadid's image and popularity among the community remain unknown, leading to low student participation in various activities.

In this context, a social media-based public relations strategy could be an effective solution to address the challenges faced by SMK Nurul Jadid. Social media, now a primary communication channel in the digital age, has significant potential to increase visibility and attract public attention, including prospective students and parents.(Urse & Tasențe, 2023)Several previous studies have shown that social media can serve as a very effective tool in increasing audience engagement, both in the context of promoting educational institutions and in building a positive image of the school.(Dermawan et al., 2024). In addition, social media also allows for more direct and personal interaction with the audience, so that information about academic activities, achievements, and the school's flagship programs can be conveyed in a more engaging and easily accessible manner to the wider community.(Cabyova et al.,

2024).

Various studies also emphasize the importance of implementing a planned, social media-based public relations strategy in increasing student participation. An appropriate public relations strategy can have a positive impact in promoting various positive aspects of an educational institution.(Ubaidillah et al., 2024)For example, in the context of SMK Nurul Jadid, the appropriate use of social media can increase public awareness of the school's academic and non-academic excellence and encourage more students to enroll. Furthermore, social media can increase student participation in various activities organized by the school, as this platform allows for faster and broader dissemination of information.(Sivakumar et al., 2023)Therefore, it is important to analyze and evaluate how the social media-based public relations strategy implemented at SMK Nurul Jadid can help address the problems faced by this school, particularly those related to increasing student enrollment and student engagement in school activities.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyze how social media-based public relations strategies are implemented at SMK Nurul Jadid, with a focus on efforts to increase student participation. Specifically, this paper aims to analyze the social media-based public relations strategies implemented by the school, assess their impact on increasing the number of new student registrations, and identify the role of social media in increasing student engagement in various academic and non-academic activities. This paper is expected to provide deeper insight into the effectiveness of social media in improving the image and attractiveness of an educational institution, especially SMK Nurul Jadid, as well as provide recommendations for improving marketing and promotional strategies in the future.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the social media-based public relations strategies implemented by SMK Nurul Jadid and their contribution to student participation and institutional communication. This approach is appropriate because the study seeks to understand communication processes, experiences, perceptions, and interactions that cannot be fully explained through numerical data. The research focuses on how the school develops its social media strategy, determines communication objectives, produces content, interacts with audiences, and uses digital platforms to strengthen its institutional image and communication with stakeholders (Lim, 2024).

The research was conducted at SMK Nurul Jadid, which actively utilizes Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as its primary social media platforms. These

platforms are used to disseminate information about school activities, student achievements, academic and non-academic programs, workshops, talk shows, institutional events, and other activities. The research specifically examines how social media is integrated into the school's public relations activities, including institutional branding, student recruitment, stakeholder communication, and audience engagement.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and social media content analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the school's public relations team who are directly involved in managing social media communication. The interviews explored the objectives of social media use, reasons for selecting particular platforms, content planning, target audiences, strategies for attracting prospective students, communication with parents and the wider community, efforts to strengthen the school's image, challenges in content production, and expectations regarding future social media development. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to explore participants' experiences while maintaining focus on the main research objectives.

Participant observation was conducted to examine the implementation of social media-based public relations activities in practice. The researcher observed the types of content published, posting frequency, visual and audiovisual presentation, audience interaction, and the ways in which the school communicates its identity and educational strengths. Audience responses, including comments, likes, shares, views, and other visible forms of engagement, were also considered as contextual evidence. The observation enabled the researcher to compare information obtained through interviews with the actual social media practices of the institution.

The study also employed social media content analysis to examine materials published on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The analyzed content included photographs, videos, student testimonials, academic and non-academic program information, student achievements, workshops, talk shows, school activities, and holiday greetings. The analysis focused on four dimensions: informational content, promotional content, audience engagement, and institutional identity. These dimensions were used to understand how social media functions not merely as a publication platform but as a strategic public relations instrument.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively and interpretively. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and social media content were organized according to emerging themes, including institutional branding, student recruitment, stakeholder engagement, content strategy, platform selection, audience response, student

participation, and challenges in social media management. The researcher compared information from different sources to identify similarities and differences and to develop a comprehensive interpretation of the findings.

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through data triangulation by comparing interview results, observation findings, and social media content. Interviews provided information about the perspectives and experiences of the public relations team, observations demonstrated how strategies were implemented, and content analysis provided direct evidence from the school's digital communication. Ethical considerations were also applied by focusing primarily on publicly available institutional content and maintaining the confidentiality of research participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The author has conducted an interview with the Deputy Head of Public Relations, namely Mr. Abdul Hadi, S.Kom, M.Pd, which took place at the office of the head of SMK Nurul Jadid on Wednesday, December 25, 2024 as stated in the following documentation.



Picture 1 Interview Activity with the Deputy Head of Public Relations of Nurul Jadid Vocational School

The findings regarding the primary objectives of SMK Nurul Jadid in utilizing social media indicate that the school has developed a clear awareness of the strategic importance of digital communication in contemporary education. Social media is no longer viewed merely as an additional communication channel but has become an important institutional instrument for strengthening school identity, communicating educational programs, promoting school achievements, and establishing relationships with external stakeholders. The school's decision to use digital

platforms reflects an effort to adapt its communication practices to changes in the information environment, particularly the increasing dependence of students, parents, prospective students, and the wider community on social media as a source of information. In this context, social media functions as part of the school's broader public relations strategy, through which SMK Nurul Jadid seeks to communicate its institutional values and demonstrate the quality of its educational services.

One of the most prominent objectives identified in the findings is the strengthening of the school's image. The use of social media allows SMK Nurul Jadid to present information concerning its activities, achievements, educational programs, and institutional environment in a direct and accessible manner. School image is closely related to the public's perception of the institution. When information about school achievements, student activities, workshops, talk shows, extracurricular programs, and other institutional activities is consistently communicated, the public can obtain a more comprehensive picture of what takes place within the school. Social media therefore provides an opportunity for the school to construct and communicate a positive institutional identity. Rather than depending exclusively on conventional promotional materials, the school can demonstrate its activities through visual and audiovisual content that can be accessed by a broader audience.

The emphasis on attracting prospective students also demonstrates that social media is being positioned as an important promotional instrument. For vocational schools such as SMK Nurul Jadid, attracting prospective students requires the institution to communicate its distinctive characteristics and educational advantages effectively. Prospective students and their parents need accessible information regarding the learning environment, student achievements, extracurricular activities, facilities, and other programs offered by the school. Social media provides a practical means of presenting these aspects in formats that are familiar to younger audiences. The school's promotional strategy consequently extends beyond conventional advertisements because the content can simultaneously provide information, create interest, and introduce the school's identity to prospective students.

The selection of Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as the primary platforms demonstrates an effort to reach audiences through different forms of digital communication. Instagram provides opportunities for presenting photographs, short videos, announcements, achievements, and other visually oriented content. YouTube enables the school to present longer audiovisual materials, including documentation of school activities, workshops, talk shows, and other programs. TikTok, meanwhile, provides an opportunity to experiment with short-form and trend-oriented content

that may be particularly attractive to younger audiences. The use of these three platforms suggests that the school does not rely on a single communication channel but attempts to diversify its digital presence according to the characteristics of each platform.

The available audience figures also demonstrate that SMK Nurul Jadid has begun to establish a recognizable digital presence. The school has more than 1,500 YouTube subscribers and more than 1,900 Instagram followers, while its TikTok account is still relatively new, with approximately 20 followers. These figures indicate different stages of development across the platforms. Instagram and YouTube appear to have developed a more established audience, while TikTok remains at an early stage. The difference does not necessarily indicate that one platform is more effective than another, because audience growth can be influenced by the age of the account, frequency of posting, content characteristics, and platform-specific user behavior. Nevertheless, the figures provide an indication that the school's social media activities have already attracted public attention and can serve as a foundation for further digital communication development.

The type of content uploaded by SMK Nurul Jadid further illustrates the strategic character of its social media management. Content covering daily school activities, workshops, talk shows, student achievements, and holiday greetings allows the institution to communicate different dimensions of school life. Daily activities provide evidence of the regular educational environment, while workshops and talk shows demonstrate the school's efforts to provide broader learning experiences. Student achievements can strengthen the school's reputation by demonstrating the capabilities and accomplishments of its students. Holiday greetings, meanwhile, provide a more personal and community-oriented dimension to institutional communication. The combination of these content categories makes the school's social media presence more diverse than a platform used exclusively for promotional purposes.

The strategy of selecting content based on student interests, current trends, and ongoing school activities is also significant. Content relevance is an important factor in maintaining audience attention. When school content is connected with subjects that students find interesting, the possibility of interaction can increase. Following current trends can also help the school remain visible within the rapidly changing social media environment. However, trend-based content needs to remain connected with the school's identity and educational objectives so that digital communication does not lose its institutional direction. The integration of trends

with authentic school activities can allow SMK Nurul Jadid to maintain a balance between being relevant to social media audiences and preserving its educational identity.

The use of social media also provides an opportunity for students to develop practical digital competencies. The involvement of students in the multimedia team means that social media management is not entirely separated from the educational process. Students involved in producing content can gain experience in planning, recording, editing, publishing, and evaluating digital materials. This experience can provide an applied learning environment in which students understand that social media management requires planning and responsibility rather than simply uploading content. The process can also introduce students to institutional communication, audience identification, content development, and the importance of maintaining consistency in digital communication. In this respect, social media management can function simultaneously as an institutional communication strategy and a learning experience for students.

Despite these opportunities, the findings indicate that SMK Nurul Jadid faces challenges in maintaining consistency in content production. The involvement of students in the multimedia team creates a particular limitation because they must divide their time between social media responsibilities and their primary educational obligations. Students are required to attend teaching and learning activities, complete assignments, and participate in extracurricular programs. Consequently, the production of social media content can become inconsistent when the multimedia team does not have sufficient time or personnel. This condition demonstrates that effective social media management requires not only creative ideas but also an organizational structure that can ensure continuity.

The issue of consistency is important because institutional branding through social media depends on continuous communication. An account that publishes content irregularly may find it more difficult to maintain audience attention and build a stable digital identity. The challenge faced by SMK Nurul Jadid therefore should not simply be interpreted as a lack of student commitment. It also reflects the need for better management of human resources, scheduling, division of responsibilities, and content planning. A structured content calendar, clear division of tasks, and coordination between the multimedia team and school management could potentially help reduce the pressure on individual students. At the same time, involving teachers or dedicated staff in supervision could provide continuity while preserving the educational role of student participation.

The Deputy Head of Public Relations' expectation that social media will contribute more significantly to the future development of SMK Nurul Jadid further confirms the strategic position of digital communication within the institution. The future direction identified in the findings emphasizes two major functions: attracting prospective students and strengthening school branding. These objectives require social media content that is creative but also strategically planned. Student achievements, extracurricular activities, school facilities, learning programs, and other distinctive institutional characteristics can be developed as consistent content themes. Such content can help prospective students and parents understand the advantages of the school before making educational decisions.

Social media can also contribute to strengthening relationships among internal and external members of the school community. Students, teachers, parents, alumni, junior high schools, and the wider community represent important stakeholders for SMK Nurul Jadid. Effective social media communication can create opportunities for these groups to obtain information and remain connected with school developments. For example, parents can follow school activities, alumni can remain informed about institutional programs, and prospective students can obtain information about the learning environment. Social media thus has the potential to function not only as a promotional channel but also as a space for maintaining institutional relationships.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that SMK Nurul Jadid has moved toward a more strategic use of social media. The platforms are utilized for institutional branding, promotion, communication, audience engagement, and student learning experiences. Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok provide different opportunities for reaching audiences and presenting diverse forms of content. At the same time, the challenge of maintaining content consistency indicates that digital communication needs to be supported by adequate human resources and systematic management. The school's future success in using social media will therefore depend not only on the number of followers but also on its ability to produce relevant, consistent, creative, and institutionally meaningful content. Through stronger planning and coordination, social media can become an increasingly important instrument for strengthening the identity of SMK Nurul Jadid, expanding communication with stakeholders, attracting prospective students, and building a positive reputation within the wider community.

Key Findings

SMK Nurul Jadid has proactively integrated social media into its communication and promotional strategies, recognizing the immense potential of

digital platforms in reaching a wider audience. Leveraging popular platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok allows the school to build a more dynamic and relevant image in the eyes of the younger generation.(Bungai et al., 2024)Through engaging visual content on Instagram, informative and creative videos on YouTube, and entertaining short content on TikTok, SMK Nurul Jadid strives to showcase various aspects of school life, from teaching and learning activities and extracurricular activities to student achievements and available facilities. This strategy aims not only to promote the school's excellence but also to build engagement with prospective students and the general public, create a strong online community, and provide easily accessible information that will entice prospective students to join.(Indrioko, 2023).

The main purpose of using social media by schools is to strengthen a positive image and increase attractiveness to prospective new students.(Siti Aisyah et al., 2024)The content presented on these platforms is strategically focused on three main pillars: school activities, student achievements, and available facilities. Content related to school activities provides a dynamic overview of daily life at school, from classroom learning and extracurricular activities to special events. The emphasis on student achievement, both academic and non-academic, aims to demonstrate the quality of education and the potential developed at the school.(T. Zhang & Liu, 2022)Meanwhile, publications regarding existing facilities provide concrete information about learning support facilities and infrastructure, such as laboratories, libraries, and other facilities, which can be a special attraction for prospective students and parents.(Siregar & S, 2021)This combination of content is expected to provide a comprehensive and engaging representation of the school, thereby increasing prospective students' interest in enrolling.

One of the crucial challenges in managing school social media is the lack of consistency in content creation and publication, often due to limited time and human resources. Ideally, social media requires regularly updated and relevant content to keep audiences interested and maintain engagement.(Moisio & Troshani, 2022)However, with teams likely having other tasks and responsibilities beyond social media management, it can be difficult to maintain a consistent posting schedule. Limited human resources also result in a lack of diverse and innovative content ideas, as well as a time-consuming content production process.(Pokarier, 2020)As a result, school social media accounts can appear less active, which can ultimately reduce their effectiveness as promotional and communication tools. This requires a more efficient strategy for content management, such as thorough content

planning, utilizing scheduling tools, or even considering involving external parties when possible.(J. Zhang, 2023).

Implications and Recommendations

Although schools' use of social media has demonstrated positive impacts, there is still untapped potential, particularly in terms of increasing active student participation and strengthening school branding comprehensively. For example, interactions on social media are still limited to one-way information dissemination from school to students, not optimally facilitating two-way dialogue or collaboration between students. Social media platforms can, in fact, be utilized for discussion forums, student opinion polls, or even collaborative projects involving students in content creation.(King, 2024). The existence of a special social media management program is a strategic step for schools to ensure that activities in the digital realm are more structured and consistent.(Bungai et al., 2024)This program goes beyond appointing managers; it also includes a series of planned activities, such as training and capacity building for the management team. Training focused on content analysis will equip the team with the skills to understand the performance of published content, identify the most effective content types, and adjust strategies based on the data. Understanding social media algorithms is also crucial for content to organically reach a wider audience.(Jain, 2022). In addition, training in proper hashtag usage will help increase content visibility and reach a specific target audience.(Anand & Cheema, 2022)With this special program, it is hoped that the quality of the content produced will significantly improve, thereby supporting the school's goal of building a positive image and attracting prospective students.

Alumni testimonials play an important role as an effective marketing instrument, especially in building the trust of prospective students and parents in the quality of education at SMK Nurul Jadid.(Anggraeeny et al., 2020)The success stories shared by alumni, whether regarding their careers, further education, or contributions to society, provide tangible evidence of the school's positive impact. These testimonials are not mere words, but rather a representation of the experiences of graduates, providing a more concrete and convincing picture for prospective students and parents. By presenting diverse testimonials, covering a wide range of fields and achievements, the school can demonstrate that SMK Nurul Jadid has successfully equipped its students with relevant competencies and prepared them to face the challenges of the outside world, thus strengthening the belief that choosing SMK Nurul Jadid is the right educational investment.

Regular evaluation is a crucial component of effective social media

management. It allows schools to measure the success of implemented strategies and identify areas for improvement.(Cao, 2024)The evaluation process can be conducted by analyzing various data and metrics, including the number of followers as an indicator of audience reach, the engagement rate, which reflects the audience's response and involvement in content, and the number of new student registrations, which can be used as a benchmark for the impact of social media on prospective student interest. Analyzing this data periodically, for example monthly or per semester, will provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of content and the overall management of social media accounts, allowing schools to make necessary adjustments and optimizations to achieve their stated goals.

CONCLUSION

A social media-based public relations strategy offers tremendous potential for SMK Nurul Jadid to significantly increase student participation. Utilizing digital platforms allows the school to reach a broader and more diverse audience, including prospective students, parents, alumni, and the general public. By implementing a well-planned and consistently executed strategy, SMK Nurul Jadid can build a positive public image, showcasing the excellence of its educational programs, student activities, and achievements. This will result in increased interest among prospective students in enrolling and joining the school. Furthermore, active interaction on social media also plays a crucial role in strengthening relationships with various stakeholders, creating a strong community, and fostering constructive dialogue. Thus, a social media-based public relations strategy is not only a promotional tool but also a tool for building relationships and increasing active participation from the entire school community.

This paper is certainly not without several limitations. For example, the relatively small sample size may not be fully representative of the larger population, so generalizations of the findings should be approached with caution. The limited timeframe of the study also limited the depth of exploration of the phenomena under study, such as the lack of continuous observation to assess changes over time. Acknowledging these limitations is important to provide appropriate context for interpreting the results and to open up opportunities for further research that can address these limitations.

For further research, several suggestions can be considered to deepen our understanding of the effectiveness of social media strategies at SMK Nurul Jadid. First, a more detailed analysis of the content is needed. Research could focus on identifying the types of content that are most effective in attracting student interest

and increasing engagement, for example by analyzing the number of likes, comments, shares, and reach for various content formats (photos, videos, text, infographics). Second, it is important to conduct comparisons with other schools with similar characteristics, whether in terms of school type (SMK), geographic location, or religious affiliation. This comparison will provide a reference and identify best practices that SMK Nurul Jadid can adopt or adapt. Third, searching for relevant case studies can enrich the discussion by providing concrete examples of successful social media strategy implementation in educational institutions. These case studies can provide insight into the challenges, solutions, and impacts resulting from the strategy's implementation. The combination of these three suggestions is expected to produce more comprehensive research and provide stronger recommendations for developing a social media strategy at SMK Nurul Jadid.

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