
Digital transformation of educational public relations: Social media optimization strategies to build an excellent school image at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong Probolinggo

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Abstract: *In the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution and society 5.0, digital transformation has become an important strategy for educational institutions to strengthen their image and competitiveness. This study analyzes the implementation of digital public relations strategies at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong in optimizing social media to build an excellent school image, along with the challenges and impacts. Using a qualitative approach through observation, interviews, and documentation, the results show that school public relations now plays a role as an adaptive and creative strategic communication manager. Media such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok are used in a planned manner through visual content, storytelling, live streaming, and collaboration with students and alumni. Despite facing limitations in human resources, organizational cultural resistance, and the risk of negative information, digital transformation has proven to increase public engagement, the number of new applicants, and external partnerships. In conclusion, social media optimization is not merely a means of communication, but an important instrument in building a school reputation that is excellent, innovative, and relevant to the times.*

Keywords: Digital Transformation, Education Public Relations, Social Media, Excellent School Image.

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Introduction

In the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, which continues to advance toward Society 5.0, digitalization has become an absolute necessity in almost every aspect of life, including the field of education (Kahar, Cika, Nur Afni, & Nur Eka Wahyuningsih, 2021). The development of information and communication technology not only affects classroom learning processes but also encourages schools to innovate in institutional management and public communication strategies (Burhan et al., 2023). Digital transformation has become the key for educational institutions to remain relevant, competitive, and capable of meeting the increasingly dynamic expectations of society. (Ekonomi et al., 2023).

One of the areas significantly affected is school public relations (PR) management (Habib, Sihombing, Rahmadani, & Wirahayu, 2023). Previously, the role of school public relations (PR) was mainly focused on disseminating information through internal print media, bulletin boards, brochures, or face-to-face activities such as seminars and parent meetings. However, the pattern of public communication has changed drastically. Communities including students and parents now increasingly rely on social media as their primary source of information, interaction, and opinion formation. This situation encourages schools not only to maintain conventional methods but also to leverage digital technology as a more targeted and strategic communication and promotional tool.

The role of school public relations has now evolved to become more complex not only as an information disseminator but also as an image builder actively shaping positive public perceptions (Ningsih, ., & ., 2022). Digital transformation enables school public relations to bridge communication between the institution and various stakeholders, including students, parents, alumni, prospective students, the general public, as well as industry and government partners (Rifandi & Irwansyah, 2021). The use of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok provides opportunities to deliver messages creatively, quickly, and interactively. Beyond promoting academic and non-academic achievements, social media can also showcase the school's culture, unique values, and innovative programs that represent the institution's identity and strengths.

As a concrete example, Madrasah Tsanawiyah Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong Probolinggo has utilized various social media platforms as part of its digital public relations transformation. Through its official Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube accounts, the school actively publishes student achievements, religious and social activities, as well as flagship programs such as tahfidz (Qur'an memorization) and student research. Social media is also used to enhance communication between the school, parents, alumni, and the wider community, fostering transparency and building public trust. This practice serves as tangible evidence that Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions (pesantren) can also adapt to digital technology to maintain their reputation and enhance competitiveness.

However, the implementation of digital transformation in educational public relations also faces several challenges. These include limited human resources with digital competence, a lack of understanding of content strategies suited to the characteristics of social media audiences, and the absence of standardized guidelines for designing measurable and sustainable digital campaigns. The risk of spreading negative information or content inconsistent with the school's values is also a challenge that must be anticipated strategically.

Several previous studies have discussed the role of public relations in enhancing a school's image, but most still focus on traditional approaches or have not examined in depth the utilization of social media as part of a systematic digital communication strategy. Meanwhile, research on how excellent schools including those with distinctive characteristics such as pesantren integrate digital public relations transformation to strengthen institutional reputation and competitiveness remains limited.

This study aims to comprehensively examine the practice of digital public relations transformation through strategies for optimizing social media. It not only describes the use of social media but also analyzes the communication strategies implemented, the challenges encountered, and their impact on strengthening the image of an excellent school. Through a qualitative approach, this research is expected to produce empirical findings that can serve as a model or practical reference for other schools to develop digital public relations that are more adaptive, innovative, and sustainable in line with technological advancements and societal needs. Thus, this study is significant in supporting the vision of national education to create educational institutions that are excellent, open, and trustworthy in the digital era.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the processes, strategies, and impacts of digital public relations transformation in education for building the image of an excellent school. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore phenomena holistically, contextually, and interpretively in accordance with real-world dynamics observed in the field. The research subject is Madrasah Tsanawiyah Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong Probolinggo, which was selected purposively due to its active implementation of digital public relations transformation through the use of social media as a public communication strategy. The madrasah is recognized as one of the Islamic educational institutions that integrates

pesantren traditions with digital innovation and has a well-structured public relations program that actively utilizes various platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok.

Data were collected through several techniques, including direct observation to examine how the PR team of MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong manages social media focusing on the types of content uploaded, posting frequency, visual design, and patterns of interaction with students, parents, alumni, and the public. In-depth interviews were also conducted with key informants, including the Principal, one PR staff member, the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, as well as representatives of students and alumni who actively participate in content creation or distribution. These interviews aimed to explore their understanding, experiences, and strategies in the process of digital transformation. Additionally, documentation was carried out by collecting data from official social media posts, promotional videos, digital publication materials, and internal school documents related to the digital PR program. Data analysis employed a thematic approach consisting of data reduction (filtering and focusing on key information), data display (presenting data in narrative, table, or diagram form), and conclusion drawing based on main themes such as the strategic role of PR, implementation of digital transformation, social media optimization strategies, challenges faced, and impacts on the school's image.

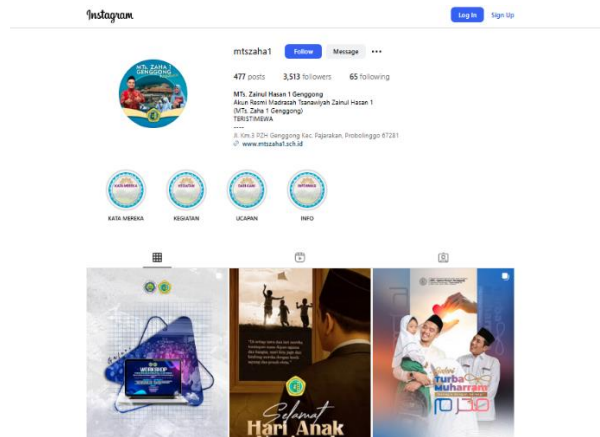
To ensure data validity, the study applied source and method triangulation, member checking with informants to confirm the accuracy of findings, and peer discussions to obtain more objective perspectives. Through this methodology, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of best practices in digital public relations transformation in education particularly in pesantren-based institutions such as MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong serving as a practical reference for other schools in designing and implementing adaptive, innovative, and sustainable digital PR programs.

Results and Discussion

The Strategic Role of Public Relations in the Digital Era (A Case Study at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong)

The role of school public relations in the digital era has undergone a significant transformation from a traditional function as a one-way information disseminator to a strategic, interactive, and adaptive communication manager (Supriani, 2022). In the current context, public relations are not only responsible for communicating school programs and activities but also play a crucial role in building, maintaining, and strengthening the positive image of educational institutions amid a society that is increasingly critical and has broad access to various sources of information.

This digital transformation requires public relations professionals to possess comprehensive digital communication competencies (Tulungen, Saerang, & Maramis, 2022). At Madrasah Tsanawiyah Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong, the public relations team has put this into practice through a deep understanding of social media characteristics, skills in creating creative content tailored to the audience, and the use of engagement data to evaluate communication strategies. For example, the school regularly publishes documentation of activities, academic and non-academic achievements, as well as inspirational content through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. This approach strengthens the school's image as a modern, active, and open Islamic educational institution. Below are the official social media platforms of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong Probolinggo.



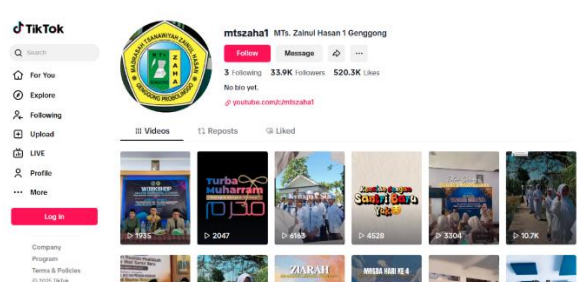
Picture 1
 Instagram Mts Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong



Picture 2
 Facebook Mts Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong



Picture 3
 Youtube Mts Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong



Picture 4
 Tiktok Mts Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong

The strategic role of public relations at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong can be observed through three main functions. First, the informative function, which involves disseminating information about

flagship programs such as tahfidz, student research, and religious activities transparently to the public. Second, the persuasive function, which focuses on shaping positive perceptions by presenting visual content and storytelling narratives that highlight the school's strengths, thereby attracting prospective students and strengthening parents' trust. Third, the relational function, which is carried out through active interactions with students, alumni, and the community both directly and through comments and messages on social media. As stated by the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, "Our strategy is not merely about publication, but also about building relationships with parents through interaction on social media." (Hazbullah Rohman, 2025).

As an image maker, the public relations team of MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong has successfully utilized the power of digital media to strengthen the school's identity as a pesantren-based educational institution that is adaptive to the changing times. Content that highlights pesantren culture, religious values, and innovative educational programs serves as a means to build differentiation and positioning among other educational institutions. (Falah, Muchlisin, Indriyani, Ulyahimawati, & Bihadil Haq, 2023). This demonstrates that digital communication strategies are not limited to publication alone but also serve as a means to construct a narrative of the institution's excellence and uniqueness.

In addition, the presence of social media provides an opportunity for the public relations team of MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong to engage in more intensive two-way communication with the public. Quick responses to questions, criticisms, and appreciation from the audience help strengthen the sense of closeness and community loyalty. The inclusion of live streaming sessions during important events, behind-the-scenes content, and collaborations with students and alumni also serve as tangible evidence that the madrasah is capable of leveraging digital media to enhance relationships and reinforce its reputation (Moh Hasan Naufal, 2025).

Thus, the case study of MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong demonstrates that the strategic role of public relations in the digital era is not only about what is communicated, but also about how it is communicated and to whom the message is directed. The combination of content understanding, visual creativity, and well-measured digital communication strategies serves as a key factor in strengthening the image of the madrasah as an excellent, modern, and relevant Islamic educational institution in line with the demands of the times.

Implementation of Digital Transformation in Educational Public Relations

Digital transformation in the field of educational public relations is not merely about the use of technology; it also encompasses a paradigm shift in communication strategies, image management, and information services for the public (Nugraha, Sjoraida, & Novianti, 2022). At the practical level, each educational institution implements digital transformation through different models and strategies, depending on its vision and mission, available resources, and institutional culture. One interesting example of implementation can be observed at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong, which has systematically and strategically developed digital public relations transformation to support its image as an excellent madrasah with a pesantren-based character.

The implementation of digital public relations transformation at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong is carried out in a structured and well-planned manner. The madrasah develops a monthly content calendar aligned with key moments such as new student admissions, Islamic and national holidays, and both academic and non-academic competitions. The visual design of the content is consistently arranged to reflect the school's identity through the use of logos, signature colors, and a communication style that aligns with pesantren values. In addition to regular posts, the madrasah also utilizes interactive features on social media such as polls and short surveys to gather feedback from students and parents, live streaming during important events like graduations or seminars, and collaborative content with students and alumni who have interests in graphic design, videography, or storytelling. This practice not only increases engagement but also strengthens the sense of belonging toward the madrasah.

This digital transformation has encouraged the emergence of creative intergenerational collaboration. The madrasah has formed a small team involving teachers, public relations staff, and students with digital skills. This collaboration makes the content more fresh and trend-relevant while maintaining alignment with Islamic values and pesantren culture. As part of its professionalization efforts, the public relations team of MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong also utilizes social media analytics data. Metrics such as follower count, reach, engagement rate, and the types of content most favored by the audience serve as the basis for evaluating and designing future communication strategies. This approach enables data-driven decision-making, allowing digital campaigns to become more targeted and effective.

Overall, the implementation of digital transformation in public relations at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong reflects the school's commitment to adapting to changes in modern society's communication behavior, building an image of an adaptive and innovative madrasah, and expanding relations with the public through social media that is managed strategically, professionally, and in line with Islamic values. As part of efforts to strengthen the madrasah's image, the optimization of social media at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong is strategically designed, not just routine posts. This strategy combines a deep understanding of the audience, creative content, communication styles that are appropriate to the pesantren culture, and data-based evaluation.

To clarify, the following is a summary of the strategic steps for social media optimization implemented by the public relations department of MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong in building its image as a leading Islamic boarding school in the digital era:

Table 1.

Social Media Optimization Strategies in Building the Image of MTS Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong School

Strategic Steps	Detailed Description
1. Audience mapping	Identify and understand the characteristics of key audiences, such as active students, prospective students, parents, alumni, partners, and the general public. From this mapping, school public relations can determine information needs, content preferences (text, images, video), and communication styles appropriate for each audience segment.
2. Creative content creation aligned with vision and values	Design content that not only showcases academic achievements, but also school culture, social activities, learning innovations, and the character values promoted by the school. Content can take the form of videos, photos, infographics, student and alumni testimonials, and inspirational stories that reinforce the school's image as a leading and humanistic institution.
3. Language and visual adjustments	Use language that is appropriate for the audience: casual and communicative for students, more formal for parents and external partners. Visuals should be consistent with the school's identity (logo, official colors, font) to create a professional, modern, and structured image. Good visualization also increases appeal and makes it easier for the message to be received.
4. Data-driven engagement evaluation	Monitor interaction data such as likes, shares, comments, views, follower growth, and the best upload times. This data is analyzed to assess the effectiveness of content and communication strategies, then used to improve or develop future content plans to better suit the needs and behavior of the audience.
5. Use of interactive & collaboration features	Utilize features such as polls, Q&A, live streaming, and stories to create two-way communication. Involving students, alumni, or community leaders as content collaborators can increase variety, public trust, and engagement. Examples include "alumni talk" sessions, "inspiring teachers," or behind-the-scenes content of school activities.
6. Consistency and continuous innovation	Ensuring that posts are made regularly according to the content calendar, maintaining consistency in visual style and messaging, and continuing to innovate in line with social

Strategic Steps

Detailed Description

media trends. This is important in order for the school to remain relevant, attract new audiences, and retain the loyalty of existing audiences.

Challenges in the Digital Transformation of School Public Relations

The process of digital transformation in school public relations opens up many strategic opportunities to strengthen the image of educational institutions, but it is also accompanied by complex and interrelated challenges, both from external and internal factors (Azhar, Hutagaol, Manurung, Nazri, & Amiruddin, 2022). Based on the results of research at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong, a number of key challenges were identified, providing an important picture of the reality on the ground.

First, the limited number of human resources with adequate digital skills remains a significant challenge. As a pesantren-based madrasah that previously relied more on traditional communication methods, MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong faces obstacles in terms of the number of public relations staff or teachers who are skilled in graphic design, video content production, copywriting, and the use of interactive social media features. This situation has implications for the length of the content production process, inconsistency in posting schedules, and the quality of visual content that sometimes does not meet the school's branding standards (Teguh Firmansyah, 2025).

Second, digital transformation has resulted in the emergence of two-way communication, which is not always positive. The public audience can freely provide comments, criticism, or even spread negative information that has the potential to affect the reputation of the madrasah. MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong realizes the need to improve the capacity of the public relations team in digital communication issue and crisis management, so that they can respond quickly, wisely, and based on data, in order to maintain public trust (Teguh Firmansyah, 2025).

Third, challenges also arise from an internal work culture that is not yet fully data-driven. Some social media activities are still documentary or spontaneous in nature, without being based on long-term content planning that considers the target audience, communication objectives, and the impact on the institution's image. This condition means that madrasah social media does not yet fully function as a strategic instrument for positioning and reputation (Teguh Firmansyah, 2025).

Fourth, limited supporting facilities also pose practical obstacles. The availability of high-quality cameras, professional graphic design software, computers with adequate specifications, and a stable internet network are important prerequisites for faster and more competitive digital content production. MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong is gradually working to overcome these obstacles, although it still requires budgetary investment and institutional commitment (Teguh Firmansyah, 2025).

Fifth, there is a cultural challenge in the form of resistance from some teachers or staff who are accustomed to using the old approach and feel uncomfortable with new technology. The process of adaptation, socialization of the madrasah's digital vision, and intergenerational collaboration between senior teachers and students as digital natives are key to ensuring that the transformation is inclusive and sustainable (Teguh Firmansyah, 2025).

Thus, the findings at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong confirm that the digital transformation of educational public relations is not only a matter of technology adoption, but also cultural change, strengthening human resource capacity, and renewing managerial mindsets. These challenges must be comprehensively mapped out and addressed with strategic solutions so that the use of social media can truly become an effective instrument in building an adaptive, creative, and trustworthy image of madrasahs in the digital era.

The Impact of Digital Transformation on the Image of Excellent Schools

The implementation of digital transformation in educational public relations has proven to have a significant and positive impact on strengthening the image of schools as institutions of excellence

(Kefi, Purba, & Daryanto, 2023). At Madrasah Tsanawiyah Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong, the use of social media such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok not only serves as a channel of information, but also as a strategic means of building narratives of excellence, values, and school culture to a wider audience.

First, social media helps schools appear as modern, open, and innovative institutions (Amilia, Rowindi, & Mubaroq, 2022). Communication, which was previously one-way, has become two-way. The public can directly ask questions, offer criticism, and provide suggestions, which are then responded to quickly and professionally by the madrasah's public relations team. It is this responsiveness that has built the image of MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong as an educational institution that is adaptive, caring, and transparent towards public aspirations.

Second, the publication of creatively and strategically designed content, ranging from documentation of student achievements, religious and academic flagship programs, to social activities at Islamic boarding schools, helps reinforce the narrative of the school's excellence (Khairiyah, 2024). These visual contents and storytelling are not only promotional materials, but also tangible evidence of the madrasah's commitment to fostering quality education, shaping students' character, and preserving the pesantren tradition that is characteristic of the institution.

Third, active interactions such as replying to comments, live sessions during major events, polls, and collaborative content creation with students and alumni create an emotional bond between the school and the public (Romadhona & Rifqi, 2022). This closeness plays an important role in increasing engagement and building loyalty among students, parents, and alumni, thereby creating a strong sense of belonging to the madrasah.

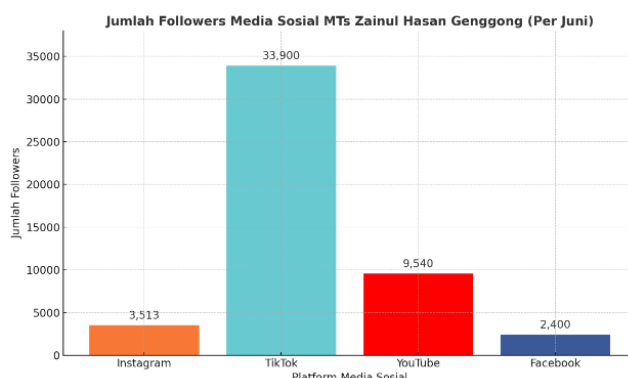
Fourth, the positive perception that has grown in society has had a direct impact on increasing interest among prospective students. Many parents and prospective students now rely on information on social media as a consideration before choosing a school (Habibah & Hidayati, 2023). MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong, which actively and consistently presents positive content, has successfully attracted public attention, as reflected in the increasing number of new registrants each year, especially during the new student admission period.

In addition, digital transformation also expands external partnership networks. Madrasahs that are active on social media are more easily recognized by external parties, such as universities, government agencies, philanthropic institutions, and industry partners. These collaborations support the development of educational programs, enrich students' learning experiences, and strengthen the image of madrasahs as dynamic institutions capable of partnering for the benefit of students. This series of digital activities contributes significantly to public recognition. Documentation of the madrasah's activities, academic and non-academic achievements, and active participation in social activities builds the reputation of MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong not only as an excellent educational institution, but also as a modern, inclusive Islamic boarding school that is relevant to the demands of the times.

Thus, the digital transformation of public relations at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong proves that social media is not only a technical communication tool, but also an integral strategy for building and maintaining the image of the madrasah as a responsive, adaptive, and trusted educational institution in the digital era, as shown in the following figure.

Gambar 5

Grafik Perkembangan Jumlah Pengikut Instagram MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong Selama 6 Bulan



Conclusion

This study shows that the digital transformation of educational public relations through the optimization of social media is not only a trend, but has become a strategic necessity for educational institutions, including MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong, to maintain relevance, increase competitiveness, and build a superior image in the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution and 5.0 society. School public relations plays an important role as an adaptive and responsive strategic communication manager, not just a one-way information conveyor. The implementation of digital transformation at MTs Zainul Hasan 1 Genggong is carried out through the use of various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, which are managed in a structured and creative manner, combining visual content, storytelling narratives, and interactive features to increase engagement with the public.

Research findings show that despite challenges such as limited human resources with adequate digital literacy, organizational cultural resistance, and the risk of spreading negative information, digital transformation in public relations has a significant impact on increasing public trust and loyalty. These positive impacts are reflected in an increase in the number of social media followers, active audience engagement, increased interest among prospective students, and the strengthening of an increasingly broad network of external partnerships. Thus, social media-based digital transformation of public relations not only serves as a means of communication but also as a long-term strategy to strengthen the school's .

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