

IMPLEMENTING INSTAGRAM-BASED SCHOOL PROMOTION: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Competition among educational institutions in the digital era requires madrasahs to communicate their institutional value, achievements, and services through media that are accessible, visual, and interactive. MTs Negeri 1 Palembang has used Instagram as a school-promotion platform, yet its implementation still faces managerial constraints related to human resources, time allocation, and content consistency. This study aims to analyze how Instagram-based school promotion is implemented at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang and to identify the constraints and solutions encountered by the public relations team. The study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews with key informants directly involved in promotion activities, including the Deputy Head of Madrasah for Public Relations and Instagram administrators, and documentation of school Instagram content, captions, comments, promotional materials, and school activity archives. The data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while credibility was strengthened through source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that Instagram promotion was implemented through four public relations management functions: coordination, motivation, communication, and direction. Coordination ensured the availability of activity information and documentation; motivation supported continuity despite limited staff and time; communication connected internal information flows with public interaction; and direction maintained appropriate language, content selection, and institutional image. The main obstacles were the absence of a dedicated social media team, limited upload scheduling, and weak performance evaluation. The study concludes that Instagram-based promotion should be managed as an institutional public relations system, not merely as a posting activity, through clearer role distribution, content governance, posting calendars, and engagement evaluation.

Keywords: Instagram; Madrasah; Public Relations; School Promotion; Social Media Management.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has changed how educational institutions communicate with the public. Schools and madrasahs are no longer assessed only by the quality of their teaching and learning processes; they are also expected to present institutional identity, achievements, facilities, values, and services through communication channels that are credible and easy to access. In this context, school promotion is part of educational service marketing and public relations because it introduces institutional programs, strengthens public trust, and supports the process of attracting prospective students and parents (Fradito et al., 2020; Kotler & Fox, 1995).

School promotion should not be understood merely as advertising. In educational management, promotion is a strategic communication activity designed to build a positive institutional image, communicate educational quality, and maintain relationships with stakeholders. Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) emphasize that school marketing involves the management of institutional messages, school identity, stakeholder expectations, and public perception. Therefore, effective promotion requires planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation as part of the wider management cycle.

Social media has become an increasingly relevant medium for educational promotion because it allows institutions to distribute information quickly, visually, and interactively. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Instagram is particularly relevant for school promotion because it combines visual storytelling, captions, reels, stories, hashtags, comment functions, and direct messages. These features allow schools to present learning activities, student achievements, facilities, religious programs, extracurricular activities, and new-student admission information in formats that are attractive to young audiences and parents (Nurmalasari et al., 2023; Purnomo et al., 2024).

The use of Instagram for school promotion is closely related to public relations management. Public relations in schools functions as a communication bridge between the institution and the community. Through social media, public relations teams can disseminate information, respond to public inquiries, manage institutional reputation, and encourage community engagement. Kietzmann et al. (2011) explain that social media operates through several functional blocks, including identity, conversations, sharing, relationships, and reputation. These functions are highly relevant to madrasah promotion because they connect the identity of the institution with public interaction and image-building.

However, effective Instagram-based promotion depends not only on technological access but also on managerial implementation. The implementation function in management includes direction, coordination, communication, motivation, and control so that planned activities can be carried out consistently. In the school context, the Deputy Head of Madrasah for Public Relations, media administrators, teachers, and student activity units need to coordinate the collection of documentation, determine content priorities, formulate captions, schedule uploads, and respond to public interaction. Without such coordination, Instagram promotion can become incidental, inconsistent, and less effective in strengthening institutional image.

Previous studies have shown that social media can support school promotion and institutional image. Fradito et al. (2020) found that educational marketing strategies contribute to strengthening school image. Ariyani (2020) showed that school promotion management can increase community interest in vocational schools. Nurmalasari et al. (2023) highlighted Instagram as a promotional medium for school activities, while Yanuarita and Desnia (2023) showed that Instagram-based integrated marketing communication helps schools promote programs despite limitations in human resources. More recent studies also indicate that school public relations can use social media to improve educational information services and public visibility (Ahadiyah & Ummah, 2025; Purnomo et al., 2024).

Although these studies provide important insights, much of the previous literature still focuses on promotional strategies, content use, or marketing communication outcomes. Less attention has been given to the internal implementation process of Instagram-based promotion in madrasahs, particularly how coordination, motivation, communication, and direction operate in daily public relations practice. This gap is important because promotional effectiveness depends on the managerial process behind content production, not only on the existence of an Instagram account.

MTs Negeri 1 Palembang provides a relevant case for examining this issue. As a madrasah under the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, the institution has used Instagram to communicate school activities, achievements, and new-student admission information. However, the implementation still faces constraints related to limited human resources, time, content planning, and task distribution. Therefore, this study focuses on Instagram-based school promotion as a public relations management process in a madrasah setting.

Based on this background, the research questions are: (1) How is Instagram-based school promotion implemented through public relations management at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang? and (2) What constraints and solutions are encountered in the implementation of Instagram-based school promotion? The study contributes to educational management by explaining Instagram promotion as an institutional process that requires role distribution, content governance, coordination, and evaluation rather than merely technical posting.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design. A case study design was selected because the research focused on a bounded case, namely the implementation of Instagram-based school promotion at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang. This design is more appropriate than a pure phenomenological design because the main concern of the study is not only individual lived experience but also the managerial process, institutional roles, communication flow, and public relations practices within one madrasah context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The research site was MTs Negeri 1 Palembang. The case was selected because the madrasah actively uses Instagram to publish school activities, student achievements, admission information, and institutional programs. The study focused on how promotional activities were implemented, how internal actors

coordinated the production and publication of content, and how the school responded to constraints in social media management.

Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in school promotion and Instagram management. The key informants included the Deputy Head of Madrasah for Public Relations, Instagram administrators, members of the public relations team, and school personnel who contributed documentation or information for publication. The selection criteria were: (1) having responsibility for public relations or promotional activities, (2) being involved in preparing or approving Instagram content, and (3) being able to provide information about constraints and solutions in the promotional process.

Data were collected through three techniques. First, observation was conducted to examine how promotional information was collected, coordinated, and prepared for Instagram publication. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the roles of public relations actors, coordination patterns, content decision-making, obstacles, and solutions. The interview guide covered four main implementation indicators: coordination, motivation, communication, and direction. Third, documentation was used to review Instagram posts, captions, comments, school activity archives, screenshots of public interaction, and promotional materials related to new-student admission.

Because the study examined Instagram-based promotion, documentation was organized through a simple content-review matrix. The matrix classified each documented item according to content type, such as school activities, student achievement, admission information, facilities, religious programs, and community interaction. The matrix also noted the promotional purpose, target audience, caption style, upload timing, and visible interaction patterns. This procedure strengthened the evidence base by connecting interview and observation data with actual digital promotional materials.

The main research instruments were the researcher, interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation checklists. The interview guidelines ensured that data collection remained focused on the implementation process. Observation sheets were used to record coordination practices, content preparation, and publication routines. Documentation checklists helped identify the types of Instagram content used for school promotion and the way public interaction was handled.

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative analysis model of Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation was conducted by selecting and coding information related to coordination, motivation, communication, direction, constraints, and solutions. Data display was carried out through thematic narratives and tables that linked empirical findings with public relations management concepts. Conclusions were drawn by comparing patterns across interviews, observations, and documentation.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from the Deputy Head of Madrasah for Public Relations, Instagram administrators, and other school personnel. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data with observation records and Instagram documentation. The study also applied member checking through informal confirmation of key findings with relevant informants to reduce misinterpretation. Ethical principles were maintained by using the data only for academic purposes, respecting informant confidentiality, and avoiding the disclosure of private messages or sensitive school information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Instagram-Based School Promotion as Public Relations Practice

The findings show that Instagram-based school promotion at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang functions as a public relations practice rather than a simple technical activity of uploading photos or videos. The school uses Instagram to present institutional identity, communicate educational programs, document school activities, announce student achievements, and provide information about new-student admission. This finding supports the view that social media can extend the public relations function of educational institutions by enabling schools to communicate directly with parents, prospective students, alumni, and the broader community (Curtis et al., 2010; Kelleher & Sweetser, 2012).

The content documented in the school Instagram account can be grouped into four categories. The first category is institutional information, including announcements, admission schedules, and official school messages. The second category is activity-based content, including religious programs, ceremonies,

competitions, learning activities, and extracurricular events. The third category is achievement-based content, which highlights student and teacher accomplishments. The fourth category is interaction-based content, shown through responses to comments, direct questions, and public feedback. These categories demonstrate that Instagram is used not only to inform but also to strengthen school image and public trust.

The implementation process was analyzed using four implementation indicators: coordination, motivation, communication, and direction. These indicators help explain the managerial process behind Instagram promotion. Coordination ensures that the public relations team receives documentation and information from school activities. Motivation keeps the team active despite limited resources. Communication connects internal information flow with external interaction. Direction ensures that content, language, and responses are aligned with the values and image of the madrasah.

Coordination: Organizing Information and Documentation

Coordination is the first important function in the implementation of Instagram-based promotion. The Deputy Head of Madrasah for Public Relations coordinates with teachers, activity coordinators, student organizations, and Instagram administrators to identify school activities that need to be published. This coordination is needed because promotional content depends on the availability of accurate information and visual documentation. Without coordination, important activities may not be documented, captions may lack detail, and uploads may not represent the full range of school programs.

The findings indicate that coordination occurs before and after school activities. Before an activity, the public relations team may identify the event and determine whether it has promotional value. During or after the activity, documentation is collected from teachers or committee members and then forwarded to Instagram administrators. This process shows that coordination functions as a bridge between offline school activities and online promotional content. It also supports the argument that social media promotion requires internal organizational readiness, not merely digital access (Ahadiyah & Ummah, 2025; Yanuarita & Desnia, 2023).

Analytically, coordination contributes to promotional effectiveness in three ways. First, it increases content availability because activity documentation can be collected more systematically. Second, it improves information accuracy because captions can be checked by the public relations team before publication. Third, it protects institutional image because content selection can be aligned with school values and official communication standards. However, the coordination process still needs a clearer standard operating procedure, especially for determining who documents activities, who writes captions, who approves content, and when posts should be uploaded.

Motivation: Sustaining Promotion Despite Resource Constraints

Motivation is reflected in the efforts of the Deputy Head of Madrasah for Public Relations to encourage the public relations team and Instagram administrators to continue promotional activities even when school agendas are dense. This motivation is important because Instagram promotion requires continuity. A social media account that is active only occasionally may reduce public attention and weaken the consistency of the school's digital image.

The motivational aspect is not only psychological but also managerial. The public relations leader provides trust, encouragement, and role recognition to administrators who manage the Instagram account. This is relevant to public relations practice because social media management often demands creativity, responsiveness, and additional time beyond routine administrative work. In this study, motivation helped the team continue uploading content despite limited personnel and competing school responsibilities.

Nevertheless, motivation alone is not sufficient. When promotional tasks rely only on individual commitment, the sustainability of Instagram management becomes vulnerable. The school therefore needs institutional support through clearer workload distribution, technical training, recognition for digital communication work, and a content calendar that reduces dependence on spontaneous posting. This finding expands previous studies by showing that motivational support must be institutionalized into public relations work systems.

Communication: Connecting Internal Information Flow and Public Interaction

Communication is central to Instagram-based school promotion because the promotional process involves both internal and external communication. Internally, the Deputy Head of Madrasah for Public Relations communicates with teachers, staff, activity coordinators, and Instagram administrators to collect information and documentation. Externally, the Instagram account becomes a medium for communicating school programs and responding to public questions or comments.

The findings show that Instagram enables two-way communication between the school and the community. Comments and direct messages allow parents, prospective students, and other users to ask questions or respond to school content. This two-way communication is important because social media differs from conventional promotion. It does not only transmit information but also allows publics to interact with the institution. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and Kietzmann et al. (2011) emphasize that interaction, sharing, and relationships are central features of social media. In the madrasah context, these features can support public trust when managed responsively and professionally.

However, communication through Instagram needs clearer response standards. The school should develop a response protocol for frequently asked questions, admission information, sensitive comments, and messages requiring official confirmation. This protocol would help administrators respond consistently while protecting the authority and image of the madrasah. It would also prevent delays or inconsistent responses that may reduce public satisfaction.

Direction: Maintaining Content Quality and Institutional Image

Direction refers to guidance given by the public relations leader to Instagram administrators regarding content selection, caption language, publication ethics, and interaction style. This function is important because each Instagram post represents the institution publicly. In the findings, direction was given before content publication to ensure that the uploaded material was appropriate, informative, and aligned with the positive image of MTs Negeri 1 Palembang.

The direction function helps control the symbolic quality of school promotion. Content about student achievements, religious programs, facilities, and school activities should not only be visually attractive but also communicate institutional values. Captions should be accurate, polite, and consistent with the formal identity of a madrasah. This is especially important for educational institutions because public communication must balance attractiveness, credibility, ethics, and institutional authority.

From a public relations perspective, direction functions as content governance. It ensures that Instagram is not used casually but strategically. Content governance includes deciding what should be posted, how messages should be framed, which language style should be used, when posts should be published, and how public interaction should be handled. This finding supports studies showing that creative and consistent social media content can increase engagement and strengthen organizational visibility (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Purnomo et al., 2024).

Table 1. Implementation Functions in Instagram-Based School Promotion

Implementation Function	Empirical Manifestation	Promotional Implication	Needed Strengthening
Coordination	The Deputy Head of Madrasah for Public Relations coordinates with teachers, activity coordinators, the public relations team, and Instagram administrators to collect information and documentation.	Ensures content availability, information accuracy, and representation of school activities.	Develop a clear workflow for documentation, caption drafting, approval, and upload timing.
Motivation	Public relations leaders encourage administrators to continue promotion despite	Maintains continuity and commitment in digital promotion.	Provide role recognition, training, and workload

Implementation Function	Empirical Manifestation	Promotional Implication	Needed Strengthening
	limited time and multiple school agendas.		distribution for social media tasks.
Communication	Internal communication supports information collection, while Instagram comments and messages support interaction with the public.	Builds two-way communication and strengthens trust between the school and community.	Prepare response protocols for comments, direct messages, admission questions, and sensitive issues.
Direction	Guidance is given on content selection, caption language, publication ethics, and interaction style before content is uploaded.	Protects institutional image and ensures that posts reflect madrasah values.	Create digital branding guidelines and content governance standards.

Source: Synthesized from interview, observation, and documentation data in the study.

Problems in the Implementation of Instagram-Based School Promotion

The implementation of Instagram-based promotion at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang still faces several problems. The first problem is limited human resources. Social media management requires photography, videography, caption writing, editing, scheduling, monitoring, and responding to public interaction. When only a small number of people handle these tasks, publication becomes dependent on individual availability. This condition affects the consistency of content and may reduce the promotional impact of Instagram.

The second problem is limited time. The dense agenda of school activities makes it difficult for the public relations team and administrators to document and upload content in real time. As a result, some promotional content is uploaded after the activity has taken place. Delayed uploads can still provide information, but they may reduce immediacy and engagement because social media audiences usually respond more strongly to timely content.

The third problem is the absence of a systematic content calendar. Without a content calendar, the school may rely on incidental uploads based on available activities. This can create uneven posting frequency and reduce thematic balance among content categories. A content calendar would help the team plan posts related to admission campaigns, achievements, religious activities, student life, teacher profiles, facilities, and community service.

The fourth problem is limited evaluation of Instagram performance. The current implementation has focused mainly on publication and interaction, but engagement data such as reach, impressions, likes, comments, shares, saves, follower growth, and frequently asked questions have not been systematically used for decision-making. Without evaluation, the school may not know which content types are most effective in attracting public attention or supporting promotional goals.

Solutions and Improvement Strategy

Several solutions have been implemented by the school, including improving coordination between the Deputy Head of Madrasah for Public Relations and Instagram administrators, distributing tasks among team members, scheduling uploads more carefully, and maintaining interaction with the public through responses to comments and messages. These solutions show that the school has attempted to adapt to its resource limitations.

However, these solutions need to be developed into a more structured public relations system. First, the school should establish a small digital public relations team consisting of a coordinator, documentation officer, caption editor, administrator, and evaluator. This role distribution does not require a large team, but it clarifies responsibility and reduces dependence on one person. Second, the school should prepare a monthly content calendar that balances routine information, achievement content, admission promotion, religious identity, and community engagement. Third, the school should formulate digital branding guidelines, including logo use, caption style, hashtag use, visual standards, language ethics, and response procedures.

Fourth, Instagram performance should be evaluated regularly using simple indicators. For example, the team can review which posts receive the highest engagement, which questions are most frequently asked by the public, and which content types are most relevant to prospective students and parents. This evaluation can guide future promotional decisions. Fifth, the school should provide basic training in photography, short video production, caption writing, and social media ethics. Such training would improve the quality of content and increase confidence among team members.

The proposed improvement strategy positions Instagram promotion as an integrated cycle: planning content, collecting documentation, producing captions and visuals, approving posts, publishing, interacting with the public, and evaluating performance. This cycle can transform Instagram from a publication channel into a strategic public relations instrument for strengthening school image and community trust.

Table 2. Problems, Impacts, and Recommended Solutions

Problem	Impact on Promotion	Current Response	Recommended Strengthening
Limited human resources	Inconsistent posting, limited content variation, and slow response to public interaction.	Task sharing between public relations personnel and Instagram administrators.	Form a small digital PR team with clear roles: coordinator, documentation officer, caption editor, administrator, and evaluator.
Limited time	Delayed uploads and reduced immediacy of promotional content.	More intensive coordination before and after school activities.	Use a monthly content calendar and prepare templates for recurring posts.
Lack of digital branding guidelines	Captions, visuals, and responses may vary in tone and quality.	Direct guidance from the Deputy Head for Public Relations before publication.	Develop written guidelines for visual identity, caption style, hashtags, language ethics, and response protocol.
Weak performance evaluation	The school cannot systematically identify content that attracts the highest engagement or public interest.	Informal monitoring of comments and messages.	Use Instagram insights and a simple monthly evaluation form covering reach, engagement, questions, and content performance.

Source: Synthesized from the research findings and strengthened based on public relations management analysis.

The findings confirm that Instagram-based school promotion is effective when supported by managerial implementation. The four implementation functions are interrelated. Coordination produces content readiness; motivation sustains team commitment; communication ensures internal and external information flow; and direction controls content quality and institutional image. Therefore, Instagram promotion should be seen as a management process rather than a technical activity.

This study strengthens previous research on school promotion and social media. Fradito et al. (2020) emphasized that educational marketing contributes to school image, while Ariyani (2020) showed that school promotion management can increase public interest. The present study adds that the implementation of promotion depends on internal public relations functions, especially coordination and direction. In other words, the success of Instagram promotion is determined not only by attractive visuals but also by how the school organizes the people, information, and decisions behind the posts.

The results also align with studies on social media management in schools. Nurmalasari et al. (2023) showed that Instagram can function as a school promotional medium, and Purnomo et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of improving Instagram quality to increase engagement. This study expands those findings by showing that quality improvement requires governance: upload scheduling, caption standards, response procedures, documentation workflows, and performance evaluation.

Theoretically, the study contributes to educational management by integrating public relations management and social media promotion. Practically, it provides a model for madrasahs that want to use Instagram more effectively. The model suggests that digital promotion should be institutionalized through

a small team, a content calendar, branding guidelines, and regular evaluation. This is particularly relevant for madrasahs that have limited human resources but still need to compete in digital public communication.

The findings also show that public relations in madrasahs has shifted from conventional information dissemination to digital relationship management. Instagram allows the school to present its identity and interact directly with the community. However, this opportunity also creates responsibility. Posts must be accurate, ethical, consistent, and aligned with institutional values. Therefore, school leaders need to treat social media management as part of strategic educational governance

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Instagram-based school promotion at MTs Negeri 1 Palembang has been implemented through four public relations management functions: coordination, motivation, communication, and direction. Coordination enables the collection of school activity information and documentation; motivation supports the continuity of promotional work despite limited resources; communication connects internal information flow with public interaction; and direction maintains content quality, appropriate language, and institutional image.

The study also found that the main constraints in Instagram promotion include limited human resources, limited time, the absence of systematic content planning, and weak performance evaluation. The school has responded through task sharing, improved coordination, upload scheduling, and continued interaction with the public. However, these responses need to be strengthened through a more structured digital public relations system.

The main contribution of this study is its emphasis that Instagram-based school promotion should be managed as an institutional public relations process, not merely as a posting activity. Effective digital promotion requires role distribution, content governance, a content calendar, response protocols, and engagement evaluation. For school leaders, this means that social media management should be included in public relations planning. For public relations teams, the findings highlight the need for consistent documentation, ethical communication, creative content, and periodic evaluation. For future researchers, further studies can compare Instagram promotion across different madrasahs or examine the relationship between Instagram engagement and prospective student interest using mixed-method designs.

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