

**PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR) STRATEGY IN IMPROVING INSTITUTION IMAGE:
CASE STUDY OF UIN SUMATERA UTARA, MEDAN**

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ABSTRACT: *Public Relations is an important part of an institution, including in Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UIN-SU), which is responsible for disseminating information on inquiry, both internally and externally. Such a way as an effort to introduce the institution to the public. The PR job is to introduce UIN-SU in North Sumatra and globally. Thus, in this study further discussed the PR strategy in improving the image of the university, with the issue: how far does the role of PR in improving the image of the university? This research is a qualitative research with descriptive-qualitative method. From this research can be seen that the role of PR still not maximal. It can be seen that one of them is the lack of publication or documentation related to the activities of UIN-SU which can actually be published as an attractiveness of this institution. In addition, the PR has several obstacles, such as the lack of funds and adequate facilities, thus becoming an obstacle for the optimization of PR work.*

KEYWORDS: Public Relations (PR), Institutional Image, UIN Sumatera Utara.

INTRODUCTION

Public Relations (PR) acting as a medium to establish communication both internal and external in an institution. The operation of such communications serves to filter, manage and present the necessary information so as to match the communication needs of the intended target group. Information is a very important thing in human life. Basically, the delivery of information is only conveyed through the media, such as social media. Communication is also an important aspect in PR activities as described by Newson and Siefried (1981) that “Finally and most important of all, The Public Officer must be an expert in communication aspects.

Historically, the existence and activities occurring in Public Relations have been believed to have existed for a long time. Frank Jekkins (1992), mentions that the holy books of the world's great religions contain a form of public relations. This can be supported by the fact that the use of symbols of a faction or group. As has been done by kings or warlords who use a shield with a certain symbol which then becomes the characteristic and identity of their faction. Uniforms and symbols are public relations media that continue to be used from time to time.

Daily public relations activity is to organize mutual communication between an institute or institution with the public with a certain purpose. Thus, the public relations activities are closely related to the formation of public opinion and the changing attitude of the community (Rosady Ruslan, 2002). Roger Haywood, who is a prominent public relations practitioner in the United Kingdom, states that a successful organization or organization without public relations is the same as a salesperson, a politician or a successful lawyer without personality (Rhenald Kasali, 1994).

Communication is a dynamic activity. It also connects the ideal and aspirations with the community on a reciprocal basis, a kind of take and give. Therefore, PR should be creative,

tenacious, and always open. Based on the belief that communication activities should be conducted in an integrated and joint manner, it must obey and heed the rules of the game (Widjaja, 2008).

Public Relations as a science related to management is universal and systematic. This means that in the PR will be taught things related to leadership in order to achieve common goals at an institution/organization. In addition, the ability of public relations practitioners to communicate and build positive relationships. The role of management in designing public relations work programs is necessary. Thus, the Management of Public Relations requires thought, and conception or planning, organizing, communicating and coordinating seriously and rationally in an effort to achieve common goals within the institutions/organizations it represents (Rosady Ruslan, 2008).

Public Relations is not a traditional science that is used to deal with short-term goals, but rather planning in approaching certain public targets. PR communicate by persuading. Therefore it is often called unilaterally that the profession of public relations is a profession of persuaders (Rhenald Kasali, 1994). John Vivian explains that PR is a persuasive communication tool that can be used by someone to motivate others and other institutions in order to help them achieve certain goals (John Vivian, 2008). PR as a discipline was first used in large companies (Alan R. Freitag dan Ashli Quesinberry Stoker, 2009). The role of PR in the company is intended as a strategy to build a positive image to the public as the main object of corporate marketing (Williem P. Ehting, 2013).

In its development, the presence of public relations as a communicator is not only considered important among large corporations, but also in education. This is done to improve competitiveness in education. PR in education is actually not much different from the business, because public relations in education still seeks to display the image of an institution in developing a good education system for the public or its stakeholders. The role of PR as a strategy pursued to showcase the image of institutions to develop good education also occurs in the *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara* (State Islamic University of North Sumatra/UIN-SU).

The UIN-SU as one of the many universities that also develops the mandate to build Indonesian human resources who are Islamic, have character, cultured, adaptive, and anticipative to the development of Ilmu Pengetahuan, Teknologi dan Seni/IPTEKS (Science, Technology, and Arts). Therefore, the Rector of UIN-SU has established a policy to conduct curriculum development by referring to *Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia* or KKNi (Indonesia National Qualification Framework) and transdisciplinary approach by conducting a review of competency conformity that has been formulated previously with the needs of the national and international labor market.

In accordance with the *Undang-Undang Dasar 1945* (Constitution of the State of the Republic of Indonesia), mandated the government to effort and organize a national education system that increases faith and piety to God Almighty. Thus, the national education system should be able to ensure the equitable distribution of education, quality improvement and relevance and efficiency of education management to face challenges in accordance with the demands of changes in local, national, and global life, so it is necessary to change educations in a planned, directed, and sustainable. To realize these goals, Islamic Universities, both public and private, need to use or optimize the existing public relations function (Kementerian Agama, 2014).

In the era of globalization, higher education faces serious challenges because of rapid changes in local, national, and international scale. Therefore, universities, including UIN-SU, must be able to answer the challenge by performing tasks, functions and roles with extreme seriousness. It is also reflected from the transformation of UIN-SU from an institute (formerly) to a university (now) (IAIN SU, 2013).

Referring to the previous explanation, it is certain that prestigious universities in the world in order to introduce themselves to the public will rely entirely on the campus's public relations, including UIN-SU. In fact UIN-SU is a university in North Sumatra that "loses competitiveness" with some other state universities, such as *Universitas Negeri Medan/UNIMED* (State University of Medan) or *Universitas Sumatera Utara/USU* (North Sumatra University). That can happen because the presence of UIN-SU that is oriented towards the emphasis on religious disciplines is then considered not to be able to answer the challenges of life. Thus, UIN-SU is still unable to become the first choice among other state universities in Medan. Thus, much needed from the public relations or PR role of UIN-SU to build UIN-SU image in order to compete with other universities. Thus, this study aims to see the role and contribution of PR in developing the image of UIN-SU itself.

This research will discuss some of the main issues, namely: the roles and programs conducted by UIN-SU Public Relation Sub-Division to realize the good image of university, as well as the obstacles and expectations of PR Sub-division. This research is a qualitative research, that is a kind of research that use observation technique of participation in collecting data. The method used is descriptive-qualitative. The data used in this study include primary and secondary data.

DISCUSSION

Public Relation (PR)

In general, Public Relation (PR) has been practiced long ago by traditional organizations. The practice is tangible with the existence of the organization's relationship with internal and external parties related to these organizations. The existence of public relations continues to attract public attention since the emergence of the concept of modern organization. At the end of the nineteenth century, PR served as a profession that actually worked within the framework of publicity and promotion. At that time there were several companies that set up a special internal unit called the PR section as in Westinghouse 1889 which emphasized the dissemination of correspondence rather than acting as public relations (Alo Liliweri, 2011).

Many experts have expressed their opinions on the definition of Public Relations. Jhon E. Marston argues, PR is planned, persuasive communication designed to influence public (Rachmat Kriyantono, 2008). Rex Harlow defines Public Relations as a distinctive management function that supports the coaching and development of mutual benefit through communication, understanding, acceptance, and good cooperation between the organization and the public (Rosady Ruslan, 1997).

Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center in his book *Effective Public Relations* define PR as groups of people in a society that are jointly bound by a common interest. Thus, the goals of the public relations activities of the organization are not only related to those outside the organization concerned with the organization, but also with those within the organization concerned (Onong

Unhjana Effendy, 2006). Edward L. Bernays defines PR in 3 terms, namely: (1) Give information to the community; (2) Direct appeal to society to change attitudes and actions; (3) Efforts to integrate attitudes and actions from problems with society and from society on the issues (Widjaja, 2008).

PR is a discipline that emerged lately. In other words, PR is a discipline of knowledge that is still fairly new. Nevertheless, over the past 10 years, the PR has undergone rapid growth. It goes hand-in-hand with the growing amount of information, whether at the organizational level, even the State. The importance of the role of public relations in this regard is reflected in the statement made by Anne van der Meiden in his book *Public Relations Interne en Extern Communicatie voor Organisatie en Beild*, 1979. He argues that shows that in the PR, information needs continue to grow, it affects the emergence of experts in this field. The emergence and development of these experts cannot be separated from the education for experts. Thus, this also makes the development of education in the field of public relations. The emergence of such education is also important to filter the information that will be submitted to the public. The information already selected will be more easily accepted. In accordance with the public relations function, the public is not only known but also must be accepted and recognized its existence. PR in its activities must have a characteristic, always open to criticism addressed to him. Thus, the public can ask the PR related information submitted.

Based on the above descriptions, it can be seen that the big role and presence of PR especially in conveying information. Not only the scope of an organization, even the State even requires the presence of this PR. Likewise, with educational institutions, it requires PR or public relations to introduce and inform related institutions, both to the internal and external parties. This also occurs in UIN North Sumatra.

The Profile of Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UIN-SU)

The establishment of the *Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara/UIN-SU* (State Islamic University of North Sumatra) started from the establishment of the *Institut Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara/IAIN-SU* (State Islamic Institute of North Sumatra) in the previous era. The emergence of State Islamic University (UIN) or State Islamic Institute (IAIN) in Indonesia itself is based on Presidential Regulation No. 11 of 1960 dated May 9, 1960. UIN-SU is a State Islamic Religious College (PTKIN) which is the transfer of status from IAIN-SU which was established in 1973 in Medan. The establishment was based on the Resolution of the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia No. 97, 1973 dated November 19, 1973. So at that time IAIN-SU was finally inaugurated marked by the reading of the Charter of Establishment by the Minister of Religious Affairs, Prof. Dr. H. Mukti Ali, MA. The establishment of IAIN-SU backed by several factors of objective consideration, one of which is because there is no Islamic State College in North Sumatra at that time. The establishment of UIN-SU can not be separated from the role of the Establishment Committee of the Faculty of Tarbiyah preparing IAIN chaired by Lieutenant Raja Syahman (Widjaja, 2008).

The presence of UIN-SU was a transformation result from IAIN-SU that had occurred in 2014. Thus, the presence of UIN-SU is still very young. One of the impacts of this status change is to make UIN-SU an International level Islamic University. It is then pursued by conducting a better education than before. The main goal of this is to make UIN-SU world-known and ultimately compete with existing universities. These ideals require a hard effort and good cooperation from the UIN-SU itself is a special section of Public Relation Officer.

Since its establishment, IAIN-SU has continued to develop. This can be seen from the increase of faculties and institutions both research institutes and educational institutions under the auspices of IAIN-SU. In Academic Year 1994/1995 also opened *Program Pascasarjana* (Postgraduate Program), Department Dirasah Islamiyah. In order to facilitate the development of IAIN-SU, established institutions to support these developments. Among these are the General Administration, Academic and Student Affairs Bureau which supervise six divisions, namely: (1) Academic and Student; (2) Planning and Information System; (3) Finance; (4) Personnel; (5) Parts of Supplies and Household, and; (6) Administration of PTAIS. To support and develop the mission of IAIN-SU, both internally and externally, the leader of IAIN-SU established several non-structural institutions. Currently, not less than ten non-structural institutions are actively carrying out their duties and activities in support of the achievement of the vision, mission, and objectives of IAIN-SU.

IAIN-SU officially switched status to UIN-SU since October 2014. Historically, the process and formal procedure of conversion of IAIN-SU to UIN-SU has been done intensively since the 2000s. These efforts received positive support from *Kementerian Agama* (the Ministry of Religious Affairs), *Kemendikbud* (the Ministry of Education and Culture), and *Kementerian Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara dan Reformasi Birokrasi* (the Ministry of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucracy Reform). Support received in the form of funding commitment of development/development fund from Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and Government of Indonesia (GoI).

As mentioned above, even the transformation of IAIN-SU into UIN-SU is one sure step to make this university an international university. Although the presence of UIN-SU is still very young, but it can be realized. One part that will be very instrumental to realize these ideals is PR or public relations. Therefore, to know the related strategies implemented by PR UIN-SU in order to improve the institutional image will be discussed further.

Public Relation (PR) Strategy in Improving Institution Image of UIN-SU

Along with the increasing competition between universities either owned by the State or private or with other educational institutions are quite heavy a college requires a positive image or image in the eyes of the public to build and maintain and improve the image in college. Thus, it is very important for universities to communicate college products, in this case the students as inputs and society experiencing the process and system of higher education, including: human (students, lecturers, employees), methods of teaching and learning process in the class and in the laboratory, and materials in the form of facilities and infrastructure produce output of alumni to implement their knowledge to the community and the world of work. Therefore, universities should focus on the satisfaction and happiness of students, parents, lecturers, and employees to achieve the main objective of improving the corporate governance of universities.

Every activity in the organization requires management not to mention the PR in conducting its activities in universities or educational institutions. Because PR is a management function, it is obliged to build and maintain a favorable relationship to the organization and its public which ultimately can support each other sustainability of both parties. Based on the research that has been done, the role of PR in UIN-SU has not run optimally. This is reflected in the results of interviews with some UIN-SU academics, one of them is Hasan Asari. He stated that:

“The role of public relations in my opinion is not maximal, not because it does not perform its functions as it should, but there are many reasons that are not

maximal in carrying its role: first, the position of PR in UIN SU is too small, whereas the level of our campus interest towards PR is so great, but only one organizational node that I think is too small. Second, its position in the organizational structure is less precise because it is in the general division, generally the main task of the general part is the procurement of goods, such as want to buy goods. I am as a Substitute Officer of the Rector here tries his best to be able to perform the task well. The problem of public relations role in UIN-SU today is too small meaning of the role and function of the PR because according to the Organization and Working Procedure its position is only the general division.” (Hasan Asari, 2016)

What is described above is closely related to the information conveyed by the Dean of *Fakultas Dakwah dan Komunikasi* (the Faculty of Dakwah and Communications), namely:

“The role of public relations in my opinion in a place is a display case of UIN-SU, when the public came then the place should be comfortable, but there is meaning PR is just to welcome and preach, in fact the function of the publicist is covering various things what is published by UIN-SU it must involve the PR, even the PR is not preached should also know every event that exist in this university.” (Abdullah, 2016).

The analysis of the Dean's revelation can be perceived that comfort in work is required by UIN-SU PR, in the future it must be thought and budgeted for the infrastructure needed to carry out its role, which is welcoming guests who want to obtain information, documentation, and newspaper clipping. In addition, to support comfort in working, it is important to provide a representative and comfortable place. The presence of living room and internet is also important to disseminate information.

Public Relations in UIN-SU has limited activities and roles in the field of public relations itself, because the Organization and Work Procedures and existing organizational culture does not involve public relations in any existing programs at the university. The lack of public relations in performing their role is also supported by the observation of the author that the role and duties of public relations are mostly carried out by parties outside public relations, such as receiving guests who come from within and abroad. The role of public relations does not appear when there are important events both in the Rector's Bureau and in the faculties, whereas the event needs to be documented and then made news that will be published in the public media so that all activities carried out are documented and can be published. Obstacles implementation of the role of PR in UIN-SU is not maximal is caused by human resources who work so far not in accordance with the skills required.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted by observation, interviews and documentation can be presented the following conclusions: 1) Public relations has a very important role in determining the success of the university in improving its image to maintain public trust. 2) The role of Public Relations in UIN-SU has been interpreted as a collection of newspaper clippings and documentation. Thus, the PR that exist in the faculty is "Intangible" as it should be. If the PR UIN-SU is tangible, then there will be things generated, planned activities, and

the purpose to be achieved. 3) Public relations has limitations in the budget so that the program had to be postponed. Thus, if the head of the university wants to optimize the role of the PR, it must increase the budget because any increase or addition of goals without the addition of financial support will only cause suffering for the executing officers. And the results that come later will not be satisfactory. 4) PR UIN-SU in reaching audiences should build the image of universities through the dissemination of information by conducting interpersonal communication to its public directly, through telephone connection and using internal and external media of public relations as a means to publicize and promote the excellence of its institution.

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