

Adaptive Strategies in Public Communication and Rhetorical Expression: Evaluating the Impact of the MBKM Program at Universitas Muslim Indonesia on Institutional Reputation (2020-2024)

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Abstract

This research examines public relations practices in universities in relation to the Independent Learning and Campus (MBKM) program, emphasizing the importance of ecosystem management in strengthening institutional reputation and communication systems. The study aims to explore public relations responses to the challenges of the MBKM program through ecosystem-based governance within institutional publicity systems. The researchers employed a qualitative method with an exploratory case study approach to investigate the implementation of the MBKM program over the past two years at Universitas Muslim Indonesia (UMI). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, focus group discussions, and analysis of policy documents and publications. Data credibility was ensured through triangulation, member checks, and team discussions. The findings indicate that university public relations adaptively utilize communication skills to manage both internal programs and external collaborations with businesses, industries, and student exchange programs supported by the Ministry of Education. Public information is continuously disseminated through the university's website, social media, and other online platforms. The university's public communication system adopts a structural and cultural approach aligned with institutional regulations to support public information disclosure while enhancing the institution's academic reputation.

Keywords: Adaptive; Public Communications; Rhetoric

1. Introduction

The improvement of public image and trust in a university goes hand in hand with the results of university rankings, both domestically and internationally. The achievement of institutional reputation and academic deliberation in higher education institutions is still experiencing fluctuations, in line with the challenges of the education system and the complexity of the public communication and information system (Ratnasari et al., 2018). The public's trust and confidence in higher education institutions is largely determined by ranking institutions such as Webometrics, which routinely releases and determines the best universities in Indonesia twice a year based on the level of access to the universities' websites.

The assessment criteria utilized by Webometrics are closely tied to the credibility and quantity of information presented by universities. These criteria encompass four key dimensions: **presence** (the number of website domains and subdomains), **impact** (the number of backlinks from external sites), **openness** (the number of accessible files linked to the university's website), and **excellence** (the number of journal articles produced by the university's academic community) (Webometrics, 2024).

Despite these criteria established by global ranking institutions, Indonesian universities have yet to secure a position among the top 10 universities in Asia. Current assessments indicate that Indonesian universities continue to trail behind their counterparts in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and other world-class institutions (Times Higher Education, 2024)

The dynamics and achievements of the reputation of universities in Indonesia, in addition to being interesting to study on an Asian scale, are also important to understand their development nationally in various regions of Indonesia. Based on the level of progress and increased competitiveness of universities in Indonesia, the advancement of universities is still concentrated on the island of Java, based on the top 10 universities ranked by the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education in 2023.

The problems of competitiveness, public communication and information systems, the quality of human resources, and the governance of universities in the eastern region of Indonesia are interesting topics to study in order to improve the practice of public communication systems in institutions, which greatly determines the competitiveness and reputation of universities. Conditions and academic atmosphere, as well as quality issues, are problems faced by many universities, including in the city of Makassar. The low percentage of universities that have obtained excellent institutional accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) is a concern.

The application of data-driven and research-based public relations functions and strategic adaptations to create the necessary knowledge, so that public relations practices are not dominated by technical, instrumental,

psychological, and behavioral perspectives, and the increase in institutional trust, is an important aspect. Currently, there are four of the largest universities in the eastern region of Indonesia that have obtained Excellent accreditation from BAN-PT, is the University of Muslim Indonesia in Makassar. Universities, not trapped in the issue of commercialization that competes for students like a company, but still operates within the non-commercial boundaries while being productive.

The integration of data-driven and research-based public relations practices is crucial for universities, particularly in the eastern region of Indonesia, to enhance their institutional trust and reputation. By leveraging data and research, universities can develop strategic adaptations that foster a deeper understanding of their stakeholders, rather than relying solely on traditional technical, instrumental, psychological, and behavioral perspectives. This comprehensive approach allows for more effective communication strategies that resonate with diverse audiences and build lasting relationships (Rensburg, R, 2017).

Currently, only four major universities in the eastern region of Indonesia have achieved Excellent accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT). Notably, the University of Muslim Indonesia in Makassar stands out as a leader in this regard. This achievement reflects a commitment to maintaining high academic standards and fostering an environment conducive to learning and research. Furthermore, it is essential for universities to avoid becoming ensnared in the commercialization of education, which often prioritizes student enrollment numbers over educational quality. Instead, universities should focus on their core mission of education and research while remaining productive and innovative. By operating within non-commercial boundaries, these institutions can cultivate a more genuine academic environment that emphasizes learning outcomes and societal contributions rather than merely competing for students like businesses.

According to (Heath and Ihlen, 2018) the research paradigm of the rhetorical dimension of public relations can be used to evaluate symbolic behavior, information, shape beliefs, and build coordinated collective norms with an effective public relations program approach. Meanwhile, according to L'Etang and Pieczka (L'Etang & Pieczka, 2011), public relations needs to play the rhetorical function of the institution through stories, successes, and achievements on an ongoing basis to shape public opinion. The tradition of rhetoric in the dimensions of social science and the humanities can enhance the position of public relations within the organization, as explained by (Porter, 2010); (Taylor, 2011) that rhetoric and public relations are inseparable disciplines as a persuasive discourse in the organization.

The practice of public communication and public relations is closely related to the deliberation and formation of internal organizational public opinion, which has the potential to become university ambassadors campaigning the university's potential to the external public. According to (Edwards, 2016), when the university's public relations communication system

with the internal public of the organization functions well, it creates a constructive meaning for both the institution and academia. According to (Broom, 2008), institutionally, academically, and in terms of public relations competence, universities have a role in utilizing the realities that occur internally and externally to become the uniqueness of the institution. Although in general, the existing problems are the responsibility of the rector, dean, and director of the university, as the institutional communication source if the crisis develops, public relations is responsible for managing the issues and major efforts to ensure that the issue does not become a crisis.

According to Johansson (Johnson, 2003), universities have two entry points in handling crises, namely as an opportunity to improve their image or to lose their image. This is where the existence of university public relations plays a rhetorical value in issue management in the form of academic deliberation, through governance and through strengthening campus identity, ultimately improving image and reputation. This is where the credibility and existence of University Public Relations is at stake if they fail to anticipate an issue that causes the university's reputation to become the object of public criticism in order to achieve the goals of the university's public relations program, which must be directed at the main targets of the campus, including the involvement of students, faculty and staff, alumni, communities, media, and parents as representatives of university public relations.

Communication systems, communication governance, and public relations information management as digital-based publication media in every institution have a complex system in their implementation. This system is known as the publicity system, which includes structure, regulations, and work mechanisms. The public relations practitioners of each institution disseminate information to their target audiences according to the publicity system they have. The information disseminated by the public relations practitioners of Higher Education includes campus information, campus policies, and various policies and student programs from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, one of which is the Merdeka Learning and Independent Campus program. A program that provides opportunities for students to hone their skills according to their interests and talents by directly entering the world of work as a preparation for their future careers, which affects the Key Performance Indicators of higher education institutions.

The concept and implementation of the MBKM program have been running at the Indonesian Muslim University. The uniqueness of this site is the position of public relations which is close to the university's top leadership, and the clear and detailed publication on the planning, policies, decisions, vision, and direction of the educational institution. In addition to the documentation and publication functions, the university's public relations actively attend meetings or meetings at the university and faculty leadership levels. Public relations are able to act proactively and dynamically, as well as flexibly as a resource person or manage internal and external public communication channels, avoiding a reactive attitude in facing various problems or challenges

that will be faced. Strategically and practically, the public relations of the two universities act as spokespersons (spoken persons) in response to campus world problems.

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The application of communication system theory and publicity in university public relations activities, with a case study approach, which examines in depth the conceptualization and implementation of rhetorical theory in solving university public relations problems, with the research problem formulation detailed as follows: How is the adaptive ability of the public relations system through the Public Communication Practices of the Indonesian Muslim University in 2022 Based on the problem formulation, several research objectives can be developed, namely to determine the environmental challenges faced by public communication system in supporting the implementation of the MBKM Program at the UMI and the adaptive ability of the public communication and rhetorical expression in responding to the challenges of the MBKM Program.

Based on the background described above, it shows that information disclosure and changes in the education system in universities have become a challenge for the university's public relations environment in the practice of university public communication, including utilizing the MBKM program as a form of public relations' ability to produce information related to the value of scientific deliberation through managerial and technical roles of the organization and branding identity for reputation enhancement to respond to changes in technology, information, respond to criticism in the form of simply providing information towards a position to answer criticism, in addition to public relations observing issues that can become market opportunities that increase reputation.

2. Theoretical Foundations

The study of public relations (PR) at the Indonesian Muslim University (UMI) employs communication system theory and rhetorical theory to address the university's unique PR challenges. Utilizing a case study approach, this research investigates how UMI's public relations system adapts to the environmental challenges presented by the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program. The primary objectives include identifying these challenges and

evaluating the adaptive capacity of UMI's public communication practices. This focus on adaptability is critical, as the landscape of higher education continues to evolve, necessitating innovative communication strategies that effectively engage stakeholders (Van Dyke & Lee, 2020).

Public relations research has historically demonstrated a tendency toward stagnation in methodologies and theoretical frameworks. Scholars such as Grunig and Hunt (1984) have noted that the foundational theories of public relations, including the four models of communication—press agency, public information, two-way asymmetry, and two-way symmetry—have shaped the discipline since the 1950s. Despite their foundational importance, these theories often lack consideration of the ideological and cultural contexts within which organizations operate (Kriyantono, 2015). As such, there is a pressing need for contemporary research to explore these dynamics in a global context, providing a comprehensive understanding of public communication systems (Grunig & Dozier, 2006).

Rhetorical theory plays a significant role in the intersection of public relations and organizational communication. Research by Ofori (2019) and others highlights how rhetoric can create mutually beneficial meanings between organizations and their publics. This perspective emphasizes the importance of narrative and storytelling in fostering relationships, as outlined by Porter (2010) and Nayar (2019). The ability of UMI's PR department to craft compelling narratives around the MBKM program is essential for enhancing its institutional reputation and effectively communicating the program's value to stakeholders.

Furthermore, contemporary rhetoric examines the production, process, and influence of symbols within media and branding. Scholars such as Heath and Rawa (2013) argue that organizational symbols play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and enhancing institutional identity. In the context of UMI, the strategic use of symbols and narratives can significantly impact the university's branding efforts and reputation management, particularly in response to technological advancements and shifts in information dissemination practices (Edwards, 2006).

As the higher education landscape continues to transform, the development of public relations research and its application within university contexts will remain a critical focus. The challenges posed by information disclosure and changes in the educational system underscore the need for effective public communication strategies. UMI's implementation of the MBKM program serves as a case study of how public relations can leverage scientific deliberation and managerial roles to enhance institutional reputation and adapt to evolving societal demands. By embracing these strategies, UMI can position itself as a leader in strategic communication and reputation management within the higher education sector.

3. Research Method

This study aims to explore the practice of the higher education public relations system in responding to MBKM program through the ecosystem and communication governance in the production of scientific deliberation values and institutional reputation in the form of activity publicity. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study design. Data collection techniques used in-depth interviews with the main actors involved in the public communication system of the University public relations and the publication activities of the MBKM program, participatory observation was carried out to determine the implementation process and development of the independent learning and independent campus programs, both in terms of policy and program response, Focus Group Discussions were conducted with the independent campus implementation team with representatives of the dean, study program heads, accompanying lecturers and students involved in MBKM activities both on campus and outside the campus who participated in the student exchange program, and document studies in the form of policy documents and MBKM activity publications. Data credibility checks were carried out using triangulation techniques, member checks, and research team discussions.

The data analysis process for this study will involve a systematic approach to understand how the higher education public relations system at the UMI responds to the MBKM program. Initially, data will be prepared through transcription of interviews and focus group discussions, alongside the collection of relevant documents. Researchers will familiarize themselves with the content, followed by coding the data to identify key themes such as communication strategies, stakeholder engagement, and institutional reputation. Thematic analysis will then be conducted to interpret these themes in depth, examining their interrelationships and contextual relevance. Validation will be ensured through triangulation and member checking, allowing for consistency and reliability in findings. Finally, results will be reported in a structured manner, discussing implications and providing actionable recommendations to enhance public relations practices, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on effective higher education communication

4. Findings and Discussion

The era of information disclosure and the implementation of the independent learning and independent campus programs have a very close relationship with the practice of Public Relations (PR) in an agency or organization, especially in Higher Education, which places the PR position as an information management official with a strategic level of access to university leadership and the public. PR as part of the public communication system of each Higher Education institution must adapt to this era of information disclosure by implementing regulations covered in the Public Information Disclosure Act that every audience is obliged to obtain their

rights in obtaining information openly from an agency or organization. The Public Relations of the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar has adapted to the era of information disclosure with the formulation of a vision to become the main information bridge for the target audience.

The Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar has implemented the MBKM program since 2020. In the implementation of the independent campus proclaimed by the ministry, the UMI institutionally responds to the ministry's policy by forming a team in implementing the MBKM program by dividing it into two groups of implementation types, namely the internal group from the UMI itself which is called the holistic MBKM which is managed independently and internally by UMI, while the second is the external MBKM which is a program from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology directly followed by students.

In the implementation stage, both the holistic MBKM program and the independent campus ministry, the implementation begins with the issuance of Rector's Regulation Number 7 of 2020 concerning the implementation of MBKM at UMI. The rectorate issued an official regulation where the implementation is intended and prioritized for active students in the fifth semester in accordance with the rule that independent learning and independent campuses provide policies and opportunities for three semesters for each student to choose 8 learning paths outside the study program.

The implementation stage of the holistic MBKM program begins with a workshop and curriculum adjustment coordinated by the Vice Rector 1 for academic affairs and the MBKM team who gradually socialize at the study program level for the implementation of the independent campus curriculum, which is presented in the 5th semester in the integrated academic management system by placing four MBKM courses in collaboration between study programs within the scope of the Indonesian Muslim University, for the implementation of foreign language ability courses the implementing center is the Faculty of Letters, for Leadership courses are held at the Faculty of Economics, Entrepreneurship courses are held at the Faculty of Agriculture, and for IT skills are carried out at the Faculty of Computer Science, students who follow the holistic path continuously in semesters 6 and 7 are given the opportunity to choose 8 MBKM paths available in the study program with learning instruments in the form of RPS and worksheets to become a learning implementation module according to the program followed by students.

The next stage of adaptation is related to the recognition of courses formulated by study programs in collaboration with industry partners, and this is a form of adaptation as the responsibility of each study program to provide an internal choice platform so that each independent student can choose which path to choose for the next two semesters. In the implementation of the program, there are challenges as a form of granting rights to students, which also becomes the university's obligation to form an

open and continuous service platform and information access to the public regarding the development of MBKM implementation, where if observed online, the MBKM program has released 22 Episodes on the YouTube Channel of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology about the program from launching to awards, developments and achievements of MBKM for 2 years, plus the continuous publication of guidelines and guidelines for the implementation of each program an explanation of the 8 MBKM programs launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

4.1 The Meaning of the Complexity of the MBKM Program within UMI's Public Communication System

The third environmental challenge is the change in performance assessment which will be assessed based on the Key Performance Indicators (IKU) which are the performance contracts between UMI and the Ministry of Education and Culture. The latest IKU stipulated in the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 754/P/2020 has three main indicators. First, the quality of graduates measured by Graduates getting decent jobs, and Students getting experience off campus. Second, the quality of lecturers and teachers measured by Lecturers engaging in off-campus activities, Practitioners teaching on campus, and Lecturers' work being used by the community and can receive international recognition. Third, the quality of the curriculum which has sub-indicators including study programs collaborating with world-class partners, collaborative and participatory classes, and the existence of internationally standardized study programs.

It is still not well organized, especially the program from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. The dissemination of information and the policy implementation process are still very limited because the socialization and programs are centered on the ministry, so the program information and regulations related to MBKM are responded to and responded to by PR practitioners differently between the holistic and ministerial programs, following the information conveyed by Head of Public Relations, Protocol and Cooperation of UMI. "The Public Relations of the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar responds to the Independent Learning and Independent Campus in two stages, namely structurally and culturally. Structurally, they are waiting for the Rector's decision to form a team. The formed team is assigned to socialize at the faculty level regarding this MBKM program, culturally at the University and Faculty level also carrying out the acceleration and adjustment process with the programs that have been implemented so far related to the tri dharma of higher education and the Islamic campus.

In addition to following the Standard Operating Procedures for the duties and functions according to the PR system and position, they have responded and disseminated information about the development of MBKM activities. The activities that many students participate in are teaching on campus and student exchanges, both campuses that have implemented

several memoranda of understanding with the campuses determined by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. Regarding the implementation, there are several forms of socialization and policies carried out, and socialization efforts through the website and digital ministry activities through digital platforms with information through the ministry's YouTube channel in the form of 22 episodes of the independent campus program and various forms of socialization and policy implementation through campus social media.

Structurally, since this program was implemented, Public Relations together with the leadership of the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar formed a team and discussed the service system provided for student participants from other campuses in the form of student exchanges. "The MBKM program has two types, namely inbound and outbound. Inbound means that there are students from other campuses who come here, and outbound means that our students go to other campuses. Well, to respond to inbound, the Rector issued regulations on the implementation and supervision of this MBKM program. The way we were formed into a team and then given a module for implementing the MBKM program."

The Head of Public Relations explained that structurally, the Rector of the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar was the first to respond to the MBKM program, then followed by the Public Relations of the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar who divided the tasks for guarding the Independent Student Exchange program. As stated by one of the managers of the website www.umi.ac.id in a research interview: "As for the information on the programs currently running on campus, I leave it to the admins of each faculty to monitor and send relevant information. Because the participants of the MBKM program are from many faculties, so the ones who understand the most about the information on the MBKM program participants are the admins of each faculty."

Culturally, the UMI ensures that participants in the Independent Student Exchange program have a good understanding of the cultural values of UMI as an Islamic campus. By providing an understanding of campus culture, Independent Student Exchange participants can easily adapt to the culture applied at the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar. However, regarding the Islamic culture, it does not require the Independent Student Exchange participants to follow the rules that apply at UMI, namely wearing a headscarf. Because the purpose of this student exchange program is to mutually tolerate cultures, ethnicities, and religions in Indonesia.

Like the MBKM activity points above, here is a diagram of the MBKM program implemented at the Indonesian Muslim University and has been published in several media: Adaptive ability to adapt to its environment by detecting environmental problems outside of itself, responding to social, technological and public changes. Public relations maintain its functional autonomy, intelligently responding to the differentiation of code that is the parent of science systems. Public relations

evolved to produce structure and rhetoric as a response, the following is illustrated with the stimuli response model in the following frame of mind;

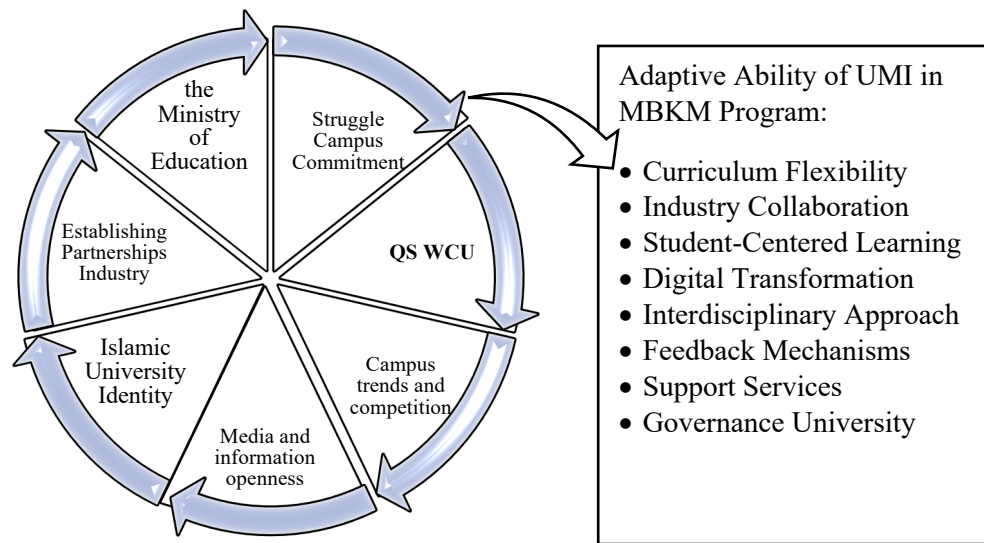


Figure 1. UMI's Public Communication System and Governance.

Source: Researchers' data, 2024

This diagram illustrates the comprehensive system and governance structure of the Public Relations (PR) department at the Indonesian Muslim University (UMI) in Makassar. It highlights the key stakeholders and their respective roles in the implementation and management of the Independent Learning and Independent Campus (MBKM) program.

At the top, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology is shown as the coordinating and supervisory body for the MBKM initiative, providing the overall framework and guidelines for the program. The central component is the PR Department of UMI, which plays a crucial role in this ecosystem. Responsible for both internal and external affairs, the PR department coordinates closely with the university's Rector to formulate appropriate responses and oversee the implementation of the MBKM program. Importantly, the PR department also manages the various publicity media channels, including the university's website, online media platforms, and social media, ensuring that the content and messaging align with the institution's ethical and religious values.

Complementing the PR department's efforts, the diagram also depicts the MBKM Implementation Team, which is formed at the university level to provide guidance and oversight for the successful execution of the MBKM program. Finally, the diagram emphasizes the critical role of the publicity media channels, such as websites, online media, and social media, as the primary means of disseminating information about the MBKM program to the wider community.

3.2 UMI's Adaptive Ability in Public Communication and Publicity in Response to MBKM

The comprehensive nature of this diagram showcases the intricate system and governance structure that the Indonesian Muslim University has established to effectively manage and communicate the MBKM program, leveraging the expertise and coordination of its PR department and other key stakeholders. The diagram illustrates the interconnected roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders involved in the PR system and governance for the MBKM program implementation at the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar.

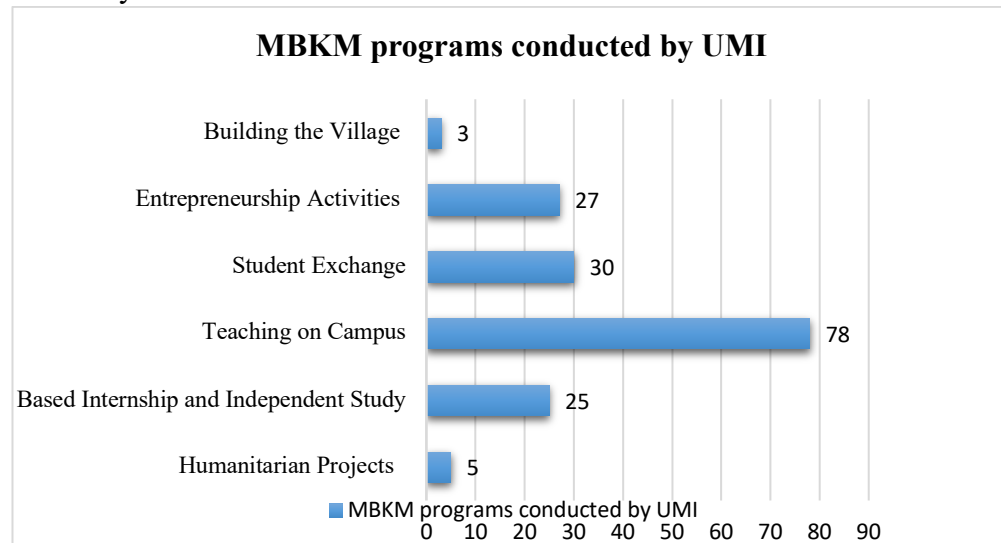


Figure 1 Number of Publicity of MBKM Program at UMI by year 2020-2024

Source: Researchers' data, 2024

Based on the diagram above, it shows that the most interesting MBKM activity publications in internal media and social media are the Teaching on Campus program in the first position, followed by the second position of the Independent Entrepreneurship program and the third position of Student Exchange, the fourth MSIB (Internship and Certified Independent Study) program, and humanitarian projects that have also been socialized and developed. The publication system used is the application of the public information model in the excellence theory approach in the Public Relations of the Indonesian Muslim University, as shown in the content uploaded on the online media and website and the Instagram account of the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar. Information related to the MBKM program contained in the publicity media conveys to the public that the university has gradually adapted the program from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology.

This figure presents a line graph that illustrates the increasing number of publicity for the MBKM program at UMI from 2020 to 2024. The key points are: In 2020, the number of publicity for the MBKM program at UMI was 50. The number increased to 75 in 2021, a 50% increase from the previous year. In 2022, the number of publicity further increased to 100,

a 33% increase from 2021. The trend continued, with the number of publicity reaching 120 in 2023, a 20% increase from 2022. The figure shows a steady and significant growth in the publicity for the MBKM program at UMI over the 5-year period from 2020 to 2024.

The Public Relations (PR) department of UMI has taken several strategic steps in disseminating information through publicity media. In uploading publicity content on Instagram or the website, the PR department of the Indonesian Muslim University of Makassar still firmly holds the functions they have, namely becoming a relevant source of information for students of the Indonesian Muslim University of Makassar and implementing the Law on Public Information Disclosure. To firmly hold this function, the PR department of the Indonesian Muslim University of Makassar remains audience-oriented. The audience is the main goal of the PR practitioners of the UMI in disseminating information through publicity media.

PR practitioners avoid uploading information through publicity media without clear regulations. The uploading of information on publicity media goes through the step of examining the nature of the message first. The Instagram account managers do not just upload content on the Instagram account. Regulations that bind the performance of PR practitioners and determine the feasibility of content are assessed based on the content of the message. The content of the message must be in accordance with communication ethics and not deviate from Islamic principles. PR practitioners examine and understand the essence of the message contained in publicity content that has reputational and achievement value and avoid using harsh words, can trigger misunderstandings, contain hoax elements, and have the potential to harm a party.

The content of the publicity content uploaded through the publicity media of the Indonesian Muslim University of Makassar reflects the vision and values of the Islamic campus, the content of which is educational values, business and program values, and Islamic communication values. The existence of a value system that binds the performance of PR practitioner's states that the uploading of information goes through the stages of checking and researching, coordination between the website administrators of each faculty, the main website administrator, Instagram managers, and publicity media managers is maximized.

The next step taken by the PR department of the UMI as a strategy in conducting public communication is to formulate an adaptive topic explanation for various people in the audience. Each content uploaded on publicity media, both Instagram accounts and websites, must be formulated in advance with the teams in the PR department. Each information content uploaded on publicity media has a caption or explanatory sentence that is compiled as effectively as possible so that all audiences can easily understand the essence of the uploaded content. Similarly, with the content

uploaded on the website, the website manager must reformulate the information to be uploaded, such as restructuring sentences, correcting erroneous words, using more friendly diction, and so on, so that the audience can easily understand the content.

The adaptive ability of the public communication system of public relations cannot be separated from the publicity system that serves as a reference for agents and actors involved in carrying out their main tasks and functions as information providers to the public or the public. The publicity system implemented consists of three aspects, namely structure, regulation, and work mechanisms. Structurally and culturally, Public Relations carries out its functions by not being separated from the coordination with the implementation and person in charge of MBKM activities so that Public Relations acts as a gatekeeper and controller in the implementation of public communication of important activities that are published both internally and externally.

All matters related to the content of publicity media for university-scale activities, the mechanism of the flow of information is managed through information management by the Public Relations (PR) department. PR serves as a spanning boundary that connects the university with the public in responding to every issue, planning related to the campus, analyzing problems or planning, describing the work system to their teams, especially in the MBKM program, controlling the progress of tasks carried out by their teams, and then evaluating after the tasks have been carried out properly. Based on the system, communication, and governance practices described above, it can be described that the policy implementation of the Independent Learning and Independent Campus (MBKM) program is carried out by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology.

The Public Relations (PR) department plays a role as a representative of the University in internal and external affairs. The PR department and the Rector of the Indonesian Muslim University coordinate regarding the response that will be given to the formation of an implementation team tasked with guiding and overseeing the implementation of the MBKM program at the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar, while still coordinating with the PR department, especially the managers of publicity media to publicize the implemented programs as a form of information through publicity media in the form of websites, online media, and social media on an ongoing basis. However, in uploading this content, the PR staff still coordinates with the Head of the PR Department as the gatekeeper or controller in terms of implementing publicity regulations, where the content must be in accordance with ethical and religious values.

3.3 Public Communication Challenges Faced by UMI in Implementing MBKM as an Institutional Reputation Indicator

The complex environmental system will generate a response if there is a stimulus from another system. In this case, the public relations system of the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar seeks to reduce the complexity of the environment of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology which provides a stimulus in the form of issuing new policies related to the Independent Learning and Independent Campus (MBKM) program. As one of the largest private universities in the eastern part of Indonesia, UMI responds to this policy, considering that public relations practitioners have a very important role as an information bridge between the organization and the public to respond to the Independent Learning and Independent Campus (MBKM) program in two stages, namely structural and cultural.

As a complex system, public relations practitioners coordinate with the Rector to discuss and issue regulations and steps that the campus must take in responding to the program. After the issuance of the Rector's regulation, Public Relations formed a team for socialization and an integrated information center related to the MBKM program at each faculty. The cultural response implemented by Public Relations is then in responding to the program by disseminating information. Based on observations and group discussions with actors involved in the MBKM program from several sources from various faculties, the researchers can identify the challenges faced by the UMI in implementing the program over the past two years. There are challenges that are also an important part that must be considered both in the policy implementation system and in governance, including the following:

The first, the curriculum adaptation process between the KKNi and the MBKM program has an impact on the academic atmosphere of students and lecturers. The ability of self-confidence and limited access to information and understanding of the advantages in participating in the program, so that students still predominantly choose lectures with the KKNi curriculum. The system and services of study programs and lecturers that have not adapted to the development of the program, where lecturers have not prepared the RPS and worksheets for the courses, including becoming field supervisors (DPL) in the teaching campus, research and community service programs as a form of involvement that can improve the Key Performance Indicators of Higher Education.

Second, The ability of the campus to build partnerships both from the industrial world and the Business World (DUDI) which has an impact on the opportunities for students to participate in the MSIB program, the mechanism of collaboration with external parties, both companies, the private and public sectors, and even the government, the management of funds by the Foundation budgeting definite operational funds to run programs that impact the quality and productivity of human resources of lecturers and students, opening access to services as the implementation of MBKM.

Third, Cooperation between universities, especially those that can mediate students, including the enthusiasm of lecturers and students to run the program, the existence of a system to support government cooperation such as facilitating internship programs for students in government institutions can run smoothly. support from the industrial sector, alumni and other partners in order to accept university students for internships.

Fourth, promoting activities to support international cooperation for private universities, both in terms of research collaboration, funding and capacity building in knowledge management. So that they can be involved in IISMA Indonesia International Student Mobility Awards activities, the campus is involved in making policies, places for the public to ask questions, a barometer of the policies taken by the government.

Fifth, strengthening of digital facilities, infrastructure and technology needs to be strengthened so that students in the regions are not constrained by the network and can carry out the MBKM program properly, as well as strengthening human resources through lecturer scholarships to attend training and the ability to upgrade teaching materials. The government can make UMI a partner who can be asked to contribute directly together in the success of the government program.

The Independent Learning and Independent Campus program has received a very positive response from the UMI. The PR system's strategy in disseminating information through publicity media related to the program is to coordinate with the coordinator of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology as the university-level point of contact formed to oversee the Student Exchange program. The selected coordinator sends information to the PR department of UMI, both for students who have been selected as participants in the Teaching Campus program and for those who are currently or have completed the activities. The PR department of the Indonesian Muslim University in Makassar receives this data information and creates publicity content to be uploaded to online media and social media.

In the Public Communication System, the PR practitioners of each institution or agency must have a system that is applied so that the goal of mutual understanding can be achieved between the campus and the internal and external public. The steps that become the strategy in public communication are oriented towards the audience, examining the nature of the message, formulating an adaptive topic explanation for various people in the audience, being responsive to feedback, examining the audience frame, making strategic communication, realizing that the audience's attention focus cannot last long, and realizing that the meaning of the message is vulnerable to distortion and easily changed.

The research findings indicate that the public relations (PR) department at the Indonesian Muslim University of Makassar aligns closely with the Communication Goal Theory, as proposed by Van Dyke and Lee (2020). This theory emphasizes that effective communication is driven by specific goals, necessitating a strategic approach to achieve optimal results. The PR department's goals include serving as a reliable information source and adhering to the Law on Public Information Disclosure through effective publicity media.

The process involves meticulous planning, where the information collection team collaborates with graphic designers to create visually appealing and engaging content. This planning phase is crucial, as it ensures that the information is not only accurate but also compelling, with the Head of the PR Department acting as the gatekeeper to maintain quality and consistency.

In contrast, recent studies have expanded on the application of strategic communication frameworks in higher education public relations, highlighting the importance of stakeholder engagement and adaptive communication strategies. For instance, a recent study by Kim and Rhee (2023) emphasizes the role of digital communication tools in enhancing stakeholder relationships and fostering transparency in university communications. This study suggests that while goal-oriented strategies are essential, integrating digital platforms and engaging with stakeholders in real-time can significantly enhance the effectiveness of PR efforts in higher education settings.

The last activity is action. The action is in the form of uploading information content to the campus's publicity media. Regarding the Communication Goal theory, the implementation of the communication system and public information disclosure carries out a maximum public communication strategy for the dissemination of information through publicity media related to the MBKM program, as evidenced by only 15 (fifteen) uploaded content about the MBKM program on the Instagram social media account and no content contained on the website regarding the MBKM program. Reviewed from the theory of Excellence in Public Relations, which is the performance standard for PR practitioners in carrying out their main tasks (Grunig, 1993; Ihlen & Van Ruler, 2007). The PR department of the Indonesian Muslim University of Makassar applies the public information model, which has the main goal of conveying information to the public, not as publicity content and promotion, but must be in the form of public information that is rich in educational value.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research results that have been discussed, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The Public Relations (PR) department responds to the challenges of the university environment of the MBKM program with the adaptive ability of the public communication system through a continuous publicity process. Through the independent campus team, the PR department provides assistance for both holistic activities in the form of workshops on the implementation of the curriculum for each study program within the University and external programs in the form of eight implemented programs that are directly participated by students organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which are packaged into information to be included in publicity media in the form of websites, press releases on online media, and uploads of activities on social media as a form of public education information dissemination to the community.

The public communication strategy of the Public Relations (PR) department of the Indonesian Muslim University in the implementation of information management refers to a structural and cultural approach in accordance with the regulations and work procedures as the characteristics of the university. This is done through the stage of disseminating information on the MBKM program through publicity media with a goal-plan-and-action approach, which aims to carry out its function as a source of information for its audience and also implement the Law on Public Information Disclosure, which can improve institutional reputation and become a key performance indicator for the University.

6. Implications

To enhance stakeholder engagement, the PR department should leverage digital platforms more effectively, targeting students, faculty, and the broader community. This involves creating interactive content and utilizing social media analytics to tailor communication strategies that resonate with diverse audiences. Additionally, implementing ongoing training programs for PR staff will ensure they remain updated on the latest trends in public relations and digital communication, enabling them to adapt to evolving challenges and manage information dissemination related to the MBKM program effectively.

Strengthening collaboration between the PR department and academic units is crucial for aligning all stakeholders with the goals of the MBKM program. Regular meetings and joint initiatives can foster a unified communication strategy. Furthermore, establishing a robust feedback mechanism will allow the department to assess the effectiveness of its communication strategies and refine its approaches based on stakeholder input. Exploring additional publicity channels, such as podcasts or webinars, can also enhance public education and awareness about the MBKM program, reaching a wider audience through diverse formats.

The findings indicate that the PR department's adaptive communication strategies play a vital role in addressing the challenges associated with the MBKM program. By adopting a structured approach to information management, the department not only meets regulatory obligations but also bolsters the university's institutional reputation. The focus on continuous publicity and stakeholder engagement positions the university as a proactive leader in public education, fostering transparency and trust within the community. As the PR department evolves its strategies, it can serve as a model for other higher education institutions facing similar public relations challenges. Ultimately, these efforts are likely to enhance key performance indicators for the university, reinforcing its commitment to excellence in education and community engagement.

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