Public Relation Management to Improve Open And Distance Higher Education Images Through Social Media

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Abstract

This study attempts to explain the management of public relations and the inhibiting factors in improving the image of open and distance higher education through social media at the Open University. The method used is a qualitative. The Findings indicate that planning community relations activities in the Open University Surabaya based on guidelines at the Central Open University. Organizing public relations activities in Open University Surabaya includes setting up staff members in managing social media accounts and website; regulating the staff structure and delegating work; communication is done both internally and externally; program implementation divide into a routine and incidental programs; supervision is carried out by coordinator and head of Open University Surabaya; the modification function is carried out through an evaluation meeting. It was found that internal barriers in the form of mastering diverse student background, information technology understanding, and heavy staff workloads while the external obstacle is internet network infrastructure.

Keywords: public relations, open education, college image, social media.

INTRODUCTION

The world of education that develop dynamically cannot be separated from the influence of information technology that is getting faster. Higher education institutions are required to follow people's needs through information technology effectively and efficiently. Along with the development of information technology that is getting faster, competition between universities is becoming increasingly stringent. Different universities compete to get potential student candidates and maintain their existence as the best institution int he eyes of society. Higher education is required to continue to build and maintain good communication with the community.

On the other hand, the issuance of rules and pilot project in the constellations od legally formal distance education inreasingly confirms the existence of distance education system as an integral part of national culture. The issuance of these rules provide opportunities for state and private tertiary institutions both individually and jointly to organize distance education. In this case, the Open University is no longer the only provider of open and long distance education in Indonesia.

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Open University has encountered distance constrainst and limited opportunities to meet student and student and lecturers with students. This cause the Open University to require effective public relations management activities as a tool to enhance the image of the university in the eyes of stakeholders.

One of the critical elements in winning competition between universities tha t hold open and distance education is through improving the image of universities. Model is a series of beliefs that are associated with a picture that is owned or obtained from experience [1]. The image or reputation reflects the bonafide of the name of company according to the views of particular institutions or groups that have an interest in the company [2].

A research findings suggested that he positive image of institutions in educational services could be used as a positioning instrument to influence the selection of higher education institutions by prospective students. The image of the institution will shape and maintain student and community loyalty to the higher education institution [3]. Another research suggested similar things that the image of higher education gave a significant influence on the level of trust and loyalty of students in higher education institutions[4].

As a tool for carrying out public relations activities, the use of social media makes it easier for student to take part in training videos and conduct questions and answer session with

teachers. Besides giving speech on the University's social media pages also enhances the University's positive image in the eyes of students [5]. There is a need of people to get information about higher education institutions easily and quickly though social media and webpages [6], [7]. Previous research has not explained about public relations management inthe implementation of open and long distance tertiary education in Indonesia.

Based on this background exposure, this study aims to explain management of public relations and the inhibiting factors in enhancing the image of open and distance higher education though social media at the Indonesia Open University.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Public Relation in Higher Education

The term public relations is commonly used in marketing terms. Some say that the difference lies in the use of marketing terms used in profit-seeking organizations, and public relations is used by non-profit organizations [1]. However, in reality, the term marketing is also widely used by non-profit organizations , and profit- seeking organizations also use the term public relations. Marketing is not the same as public relations, but all these functions have the purpose of providing service. Marketing appears not to meet the interests of the institutions itself, but to provide satisfaction to consumers [1]. Public relations has a primary function as a communication tool, while marketing includes needs evaluation, product development, distribution, and tariff determination [8].

Educational institutions as organizations cannot be separated from public relations activities. In this case, educational institutions are not only dealing with the education service customers, suppliers of educational service, and education service intermediaries, educational institutions carry out this activity with the broader community. Public relations activities are usually carried out using approaches through various aspects. That essential aspects that must be considered by public relations practitioners include,

a) Framing message, how to choose and write messages that will deliver to the target audience through social media?

b) News value, whether the news and information delivered through social media have news value that attracts the attention of the target audience and the mass media?

c) Semiotics, whether the message and information delivered through social media have clear and unambiguous meanings?

d) Symbols, what are symbols that use in conducting public relations activities?

e) Stereotypes, namely what image do people want to create and highlight through public relations activities?[9]

This is done to build people's understanding of the marketing activities of education services. Public relations activities in educational institutions include systmatic efforts to establish and maintain mutual trust between educational institutions and the community [10].

Open and Distance Education

The Distance education system which is perceived as a 21st-century innovation is an aducation system that has a wide range, across space, time, and socioeconomics. The distance education system opens access to education for anyone, anywhere, anytime. This characteristic of distance education makes the distance eduacation system considered a solution to educational problems related to even distribution and democratization of education.

The development of science and technology today has developed very rapidly. The spread of information becomes faster through distance, space, and time. Education also does not escape being affected by these developments, so that the distance learning emerges which utilizes information and communication system for the sake od educational equity. Learning by utilizing information and communication technology does not require educators and students to be in one place and time. However it can be done in various places.

Through information and communication technology, there is an increase in personal connectedness in the field of education. The global environment is seen in several respects as an answer to poverty and other problems through increased distibuted learning oppotunities [11]. The wen-enhanced course model makes the internet provider of learning resources that can be accesed online. The internet is also means for students to improve communication, both fellow students, students with teachers, or students with other groups outside the school institutions. In open and distance educations, th e internet does not play a role as a supporter of teaching activities but also the main factors that determine the course of teaching.

Open and ditance education has the characteristics of being open, independent learning, complete learning, using information and communication technology, using other educational technologies and integrated learning in higher education. The implementation of the distance learning program is based on the principle of open education and distance education. In the model of open and extended distance educations, teachers and students are separated by time and space. However discussions can still be carried out, both synchronously and asynchcronously. All teching activities are carried out through the internet so that face to face physical activities are not needed

The Imagery in Higher Education

Images is a picture that is in someone's mind[12]. The image of a university is a factor in increasing competitiveness and is one of the critical elements of intagible resources that will be the source of the creation of conditions for the excellence of an institution's capabilities and experiences that accumulates so that the college has the best peformance for stakeholders[2].

Regarding the image of a university as a organization, a brand is an essential element in determining the theme of advertising. Havins strong branding is valuable aspect of surviving in the midst of competition between universities. In improving the image of higher education, brand marketing is a symbol of describing all information about services and products produced by universities. Brands in universities usually consist of names, logos, and other visual elements such as images, typhography, colors, and symbols. The brand is also visualizations of the image that wants to be implanted in the mind of customers [13]. Improving the image is one of the explicit goals of community relations activities in college. The promary target of community relations activities in higher education is to instill a postitive image to the public in order to maintain the existence and obtain support from the community.

Social Media

The era of technology and information currently offers social media as a place to fulfill that desire. The definition of social media is a group of Internet-Based application that are built from ideas and technology on Web 2.0 that enable the exchange information between users[14]. Social media in an online media tha

allows users to participate easily. Participation can be in the form af sharing information, creating content to be conveyed, commenting on input received and so on[15].

The forms of social media include Facebook, Twitter, Blog or other social networks. Futhermore, there is also types of social media namely blogs, collaborative projects, microblogging, social networking sites, content communitites, virtual social worlds, and virtual games worlds[16]. Another views similar to that classifies social media into six main types of social networks, blogs, wikis, podcasts, forums, content communitites, and microblogging[17].

MATERIAL AND METHOD

A qualitative research method was employed in this study to produce descriptive data result, this study uses qualitative data analysis of interactive models[18]. The stages of analysis in this study consist of three main stages, namely summarizing data, presenting data, and drawing conclusion. This research was conducted in the Surabaya Open University Distance Learning Program Unit (UPBJJ-UT Surabaya). Open University Surabaya was chosen as the location of the study because it was considered to be able to represent the institution of open and distance education in Indonesia.

Data Collection

Data collection methods used by researchers are in-depth interviews and documentary studies determination of informants in this study using purposive sampling. The main informant of this study was the Head of Open University Surabaya who was considered to know and understand about matters relating to public relations management through social media at Open University Surabaya. Based on information from the main informant, the researcher folowed up by assigning the next informat, namely the coordinator of learning support & learnign material service of Open University Surabaya. Social media admnistrator and websites of the Open University Surabaya, Management of Open University Surabaya study group, and Open University Surabaya students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The importance of the image for higher education is shown when the degree of student loyalty tends to be higher when the perception and image of the college are following the expectation of the students. The relationship

between the two also affects student loyalty. One thing that can be done to improve the image is through public relations activities [19]. When implementing its work program, public relations practitioners use the management concept. The aim is to facilitate the implementation of tasks and support all stages of work on public relations [8]. The steps of the jobs include planning, coordinating, communicating, actuating, controlling, evaluating, and modification [20].

Planning the purpose of planning community relations activities in Open University Surabaya is that students are more easily reaching out to the information they need regarding events at the university. In this case, the target audience is students who need the media to get information easily and quickly. Broad and inexpensive social media coverage are considered suitable for this purpose. The strategy carried out by Open University Surabaya in carrying out community relation activities included making explicit message and attracting public attention to read the information further. The signal that was made was then evaluated through a discussion by the Head of Open University Surabaya with staff and coordinators. The media used for delivering these messages is through social media accounts and university website. The message conveyed in university social media accounts is not only precise information but also words and motivation for students.

The description of research on service dissemination activities accompanied by data can be useful for determining strategies in facing competition among institutions in an increasingly dynamic and rapidly changing internet era[21]. However, there is rapid development where institutions carry out online socialization activities by taking into account three main issues, namely strategic planning and workflow, data storage and campaign analysis through various channels including digital channels. the use of digital channels is considered cheaper and easier to reach potential service users.

Organizing, the division of task in public relations activities through social media in Open University Surabaya that the management staff of social media accounts and websites have the role of publishing information and news while providing prompt and appropriate responses to students who need specific information while the coordinator and Head of Open University Surabaya have the responsibility to supervise staff.

Coordinating, in carrying out management tasks, Open University Surabaya has a staff structure to achieve the objectives. Head of Open University Surabaya assisted by the Head of Administration. Coordinator of Registration & Examination, and Learning aid & Learning Materials Coordinator. In addition to coordinators, the Head of Open University Surabaya also assisted by lecturers and administrative staff in serving students who are within their reach. Implementation of Open University Surabaya functions relating to socialization and promotion is carried out through community relations activities.

Communicating, public relations management in Open University Surabaya includes delivering program plans to students and the community both internally and externally.

Through the presentation of the interview results, it was found that communicating the community relations program plan to staff was carried out through briefing meetings at least once a month. The frequency of meetings held if there are special announcement from the Central Open University so that a change of plan or plan for new activities is needed. While externally, specifically for necessary education majors (PGSD and PG-PAUD), Open University Surabaya utilize the management of lecturers in each region to deliver information and news to the public and students. Submission of program plans externally in departments other than primary education is generally carried out through social media and the univerity websites. Uploaded program plans include academic calendars, online learning services, departmental catalogues, and other services.

Actuating, the implementation of imaging through public relations management in Open University Surabaya is carried out by providing information related to the activities of the institution, lecturers activities, and student activities. This information dissemination aims to introduce the profile of the Open Universitt more deeply to the community. The implementations of this public relations program is divided into riutine and incidental types of programs. The routine program implementaion is carried out continuously following the initial plans that have been made previously. Routine programs can be changed at any time if there are related community relations programs. In addition to routine community relations activities, Open University Surabaya also has related program

activities. Incidental community relation program activities are carried aout for a certain period. This related work program tends to be implemented if the Open University organizes excellent activities such as Anniversary and Graduation.

Controlling aspect of public relation activities at Open University Surabaya was carried out flexible and not rigidly although supervision is carried out by many parties, namely from the leadership of Open University Surabaya itself and the central Open University, if something goes wrong or changes can still be dealt quickly. The supervision aspect of public relations activities through social media in Open University Surabaya can be broken down into two types, namely direct and indirest supervision. Direct supervision in community relations activities in Open University Surabaya was carried out by the Head of Open University Surabaya and the coordinator to assist. The Head and ccordinator must approve all uploads on social media and website to avoid wrong and ineffective information to be uploaded. The Central Open University public relations staff demanded the menagemenr staff of the social media account and the Open University Surabaya respond quickly and accurartely to the comments and questions from student and the community. Besides that, information uploaded through social media accounts and webpages is supervised indirectly by the Central Open University to maintain good reputation of Open University Surabaya.

Modification aspect in public relations management at Open University Surabaya are carried out in the orm of evaluation meetings and changes that are tailored to the needs and conditons of Open University Surabaya. Evaluation is not only done through formal meetings, but evaluation is also done through directives and conversations between staff who have the responsbility of carrying out public relation activities.

The Obtacles

There are diffrences between empirical conditions and ideal values of factors that influence the image of universities. Based on the findings of these studies, factors that influence the image of higher education can come from internal factors, international reputation, academics, academic curriculum, and the university environment[4]. This study also shows that the image of higher education has a significant impact on student confidence in higher education

One of the internal barrier that appear in public relations management at the Open University is heterogenity in mastering the information technology among student. The hetereogenity of mastery information technology among student makes it difficult for university to carry out public relations activities only through social media. Open University Surabaya is required to use other methods besides social media to convey information to student whose ability to use technology is still lacking. Research study explained that socialization through internet media has increased so that the existence of universities in social media is considered necessary to shape the image and to introduce services provided by University to community. However, socializations through social media is not the only method used by the University. The most effective method of disseminating services obtained from the official websites, event, open-days, and representatives from the universitity which conducted simultaneously [22].

The large and heterogenous number of student also impacts on the heavy workload for staff to continue to oversee the Open University Surabaya social media account. Staff must be able to respond immediately if some student or communities need specific information. While the number of stafff is limited, this requied college commitment in providing resources from managing social media accounts. The importance of high commitment in providing resources is explained in a research that there is clear demand from the publis to get informaton about university through social media so that universities are required to have readiness in providing information on services in universities[6]. In additions to internal barriers, external barriers related to internet network infrastructure. A reliable internet network is a necessity to access information and manage Open University Surabaya social media accounts. The solution provides by university when internet network got interupted or down is front-desk managesrs and staff direct student and community to use Short Message Services or telephone. Student who needs information can also come directly to the campus.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to research on the role of public relations management in shaping

the image of higher education through social media. The supporting aspects are:

Planning: Planning public relations activities in Open University Surabaya are done based on guidelines made at the central Open University. These guidelines was then adjusted to the needs of Open University in Surabaya to become action plan, including community relations activities through social media.

Organizing: organizing public relations activities in Open University Surabaya includes setting up staff members in managing social media accounts and websites, needed resources, and monitoring staff performance by the Head of Open University Surabaya. The staff assigned to manage social media accounts and website divided into three staff. Two front desk staff tasked with managing and replying to incoming message and questions from students and the community in social media account and 1 staff member having the task to manage university website. The coordinator have the responsibility to monitor the performance of those staffs

Coordinating: the organizational structure in Open University Surabaya starts from the Chancellor of the Open University. Head of Open University Surabaya assisted by the Head of Administration, Coordinator of Registration and Examination, and Learning Aid & Learning Materials Coordinator. In addition to the coordinators, the Head of Open University Surabaya was also assisted by lecturers and administrative staff. The organizational structure in managing social media and website is the Head of Open University Surabaya work as the person in charge. Then there are two coordinators under him. The coordinators in charge of managing social media accounts and the University websites while conducting public relations activities.

Communicating: the communication aspect of public relations management in Open University Surabaya includes the delivery of program plans to students and the community both internally and externally. Submission of program plans internally is carried out through meetings and briefings. Submission of external public relations program plans is carried out through social media and websites.

Actuating: the aspect of implementing public relations management activities at Open University Surabaya is the act of running the program by the plans that have been made before. The implementation of this activity was carried out by referring to the plans agreed upon by the Head of Open University. The implementation programs are divided into the regular program and related program.

Controlling: the supervision aspect is carried out by the coordinator and the Head of Open University Surabaya. Before any material be uploaded to social media and websites, those materials will be screened and agreed upon by coordinators and the Head of Open University. This process is carried out flexible and not rigid.

Modification: the function of modification in public relations management in Open University Surabaya is carried out in the form of evaluating and meetings. Any changes tailored to the needs ad condition refer to the public relation material. Evaluations are not only done through formal meetings, evaluations was also done through casual conversation between staff.

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