

Navigating Challenges in Islamic Education: Strategic Management for Community Involvement and Modernization

Alisyah Pitri¹, Martinis Yamin², Abdul Halim²

¹Institut Islam Al Mujaddid Sabak, Jambi, Indonesia, ²Universitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin, Jambi, Indonesia

Corresponding author e-mail: alisyahpitri31@gmail.com

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the strategic management of SMPIT (Integrated Islamic Junior High School) An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi in building relationships with the community, using the Nine-Step Strategic Planning theory and Gitney's Hierarchy of Needs. This qualitative research employs a phenomenological approach, with data collection techniques including interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman implements a series of well-planned and directed strategic management efforts to strengthen relationships with the community, including: (1) fostering connections through social service activities, (2) collaborating with educational institutions, and (3) actively engaging parents in school activities. A key strength of the communication efforts at SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman lies in the involvement of middle-class parents, who actively support the school's programs. The school's public relations initiatives are also supported by: (1) the utilization of social media, (2) participation in special events, and (3) backing from the Integrated Islamic Schools Network (JSIT). In the Islamic educational institution management context, these efforts demonstrate a comprehensive strategic approach, involving in-depth analysis of internal and external conditions, reinforcing an Islamic values-based curriculum, and collaborating with the community, government, and parents. Supporting factors include strong leadership, social acceptance, and adequate infrastructure, while challenges encompass perceptions of high education costs and social dynamics. This strategy reflects a modern, adaptive, and values-based approach to Islamic education.

Keywords: Community Engagement, Parental Participation, Strategic Management of Public Relations Communication

A. Introduction

Based on preliminary research conducted at SMPIT (Integrated Islamic Junior High School) An-Nahl Percikan Iman in Jambi City, the school began admitting students in the 2020–2021 academic year. In its inaugural year, SMPIT An-Nahl Percikan Iman admitted 164 students. In the following academic year, 2021–2022, the number

of new student admissions increased by 45.12%, reaching 238 students. This upward trend continued in the 2022–2023 academic year, with student enrollment rising to 285, representing a further increase of 19.74%. These figures indicate a consistent year-over-year growth in student enrollment over the past three academic years.

Based on the description above, studying the strategic management of Integrated Islamic Educational Institutions in building relationships with the community becomes increasingly important, for several reasons. First, in the context of accelerated changes in life that are becoming more complex and competitive, Islamic educational institutions are required to remain relevant by maintaining their uniqueness, strengths, and a positive image in educational services. Failure to provide dynamic educational services and community engagement may result in declining public interest, ultimately leading to the institution's inability to sustain its existence (Syarif, 2021; Ward, 2020).

Second, in the context of strategic management for strengthening community relations, educational services managed without community support and participation may lead to the institution becoming isolated (Maier et al., 2017). This sense of detachment can ultimately threaten the institution's survival and result in it being abandoned by the community (Fauziyati, 2018).

Third, in the aspect of developing public relations theory within Islamic education, the uniqueness and distinctiveness of an institution—particularly in the context of community engagement—need to be highlighted. These characteristics can serve as a trademark and become a trigger for other educational institutions that share the goal of fostering an enlightened and educated society (Jayadi et al., 2018).

Fourth, from a practical standpoint, this study is essential for enhancing the reputation of Integrated Islamic Schools in Jambi. A school's reputation plays a crucial role in influencing public decisions when choosing an educational institution for their children. By conducting research on effective communication strategies, school public relations efforts can be optimized to improve the school's reputation and attract greater community interest in selecting the institution as a place of education for their children (Hakim & Rozi, 2024; Wahid et al., 2025).

Fifth, in the context of school strategic management, communication strategies play a vital role in shaping a positive image of an organization or institution—including school public relations. Effective school communication is essential, as it serves a crucial function in building and maintaining a favorable public perception (Lieyani et al., 2025; S. H. Rahmat et al., 2025). The importance of public relations communication strategies can be outlined in several key points: 1) Building a positive image - Effective communication helps establish and reinforce a favorable perception of the institution; 2) Enhancing public trust - Transparent and consistent messaging fosters greater confidence from the community; 3) Strengthening

community relations, active engagement builds strong, mutually beneficial connections with stakeholders; 4) Increasing competitiveness, a strong communication strategy can differentiate the school in a competitive educational landscape; dan 5) Ensuring institutional sustainability. Maintaining visibility and relevance is essential for the school's continued existence (Kustiawan et al., 2024).

Çoruk (2018), in his article titled "*School Principals' Opinions about Public Relations Practices on Schools,*" states that schools play a significant role in shaping and influencing the future of families and communities. School principals must understand the nature and expectations of the school environment and respond to its needs. Therefore, it is essential for principals to take an active role in fostering and enhancing community and parental involvement in school activities.

Moore (2009) argues that a positive relationship between schools and the community requires open, transparent, and effective communication, as well as active participation from all stakeholders. This fosters a sense of trust and ownership, ensuring that schools and communities collaborate effectively to achieve shared goals (Moore, 2016; Moore & Elliott, 2016).

Yusup (2017), in his study, concluded that religious exclusivism within JSIT (Jaringan Sekolah Islam Terpadu) is indicated by four distinctive characteristics of Integrated Islamic Schools: First, a textual and literal approach in understanding sacred texts (*textualism*). Second, a strong belief that salvation can only be attained through Islam, accompanied by a firm rejection of the existence of other religions and their followers (*truth-claim*). Third, a rejection of the separation between Islam and the state, as it is considered incompatible with Islamic teachings. Fourth, a deep conviction that the Indonesian government, in collaboration with Christians (and/or Jews or non-believers in general), is engaged in a conspiracy to weaken the power of the Muslim community—referred to by the group as the *thaghut conspiracy*.

B. Methods

The approach used in this study is a phenomenological approach. In its implementation, the research was designed, planned, and carried out as a scientific process that integrates all available opportunities and resources (Arikunto, 2016; Nawawi, 2007). This study employs analytical and descriptive methods, meaning that problem-solving procedures are conducted by describing the conditions of the research object/subject (such as individuals, institutions, communities, etc.).

The stages involved in this approach are commonly referred to as *fact-finding*, which, at the initial stage, aims to comprehensively present the observed phenomena from various perspectives, thereby clarifying the overall situation and conditions. If difficulties arise in explaining the realities or facts encountered, this approach must be

followed by proper interpretation of the various findings to ensure accurate understanding.

The descriptive-analytical process employed in this study consists of three stages: the presentation of relevant theories, data description, and analysis of the relevance between the applied theories and actual practices. Through this research approach, the study aims to provide a fundamental description and uncover the strategies used by the educational institution in establishing relationships with the community. The researcher then conducts a comparison between theoretical frameworks and field findings. Subsequently, the data is analyzed to identify patterns and interrelated factors in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena occurring at SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman, Jambi City (Stommel & Wills, 2004).

The key subject in this study is the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi, as the individual considered to have the most comprehensive understanding of the school's situation. The principal is perceived as being free from conflict with existing stakeholders, willing to share information and knowledge, and responsible for providing credible, accountable, and trustworthy information (Creswell, 2012; Given, 2008). Other participants in this study include the public relations staff, teachers, relevant educational personnel, and several community members who are part of the social context surrounding SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman in Jambi City.

Data collection techniques in this study include: (1) observation, (2) interviews, and (3) document analysis (Bungin, 2015; J. W. Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moleong, 2019; Kristiawan & Asvio, 2018; Ratna, 2010). The data analysis procedures, which consists of three steps (Matthew B. Miles, 1994; Miles et al., 2014): 1) *Data condensation*; 2) *Data display*; 3) *Conclusion drawing/verification*. To ensure data validity, this study adopts several verification techniques as proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1996), namely: 1) Credibility test; 2) Transferability test; 3) Dependability test; and 4) Confirmability test (Moleong, 2019; Sugiyono, 2019).

C. Results and Discussion

The Principal's Communication Strategy at SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi

The communication strategy employed by the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi plays a crucial role in managing the relationship between the school and its surrounding community, through the lens of effective and continuous communication. By regularly providing updates on school developments, student achievements, and new policies, the school not only affirms the principal's commitment to transparency but also establishes an open and sustainable channel of communication with the community. These efforts lay a solid foundation for building trust and encouraging active community involvement in the school's educational activities and processes.

In addition, the principal plays a vital role in facilitating parental involvement in their children's school life. This goes beyond merely providing regular information about school activities; it also involves creating platforms for collaboration and active parental participation in supporting students' educational processes. As a result, the communication established between the school and parents becomes more meaningful, contributing to the development of an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Moreover, the principal's communication strategy at SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi aims to educate the community about the school's vision, mission, and educational programs. By providing clear and comprehensive information regarding the school's values and objectives, the school seeks to foster a deep and positive understanding of its role and contribution to the character development and future of its students. This creates a strong foundation for community support and strengthens the relationship between the school and its stakeholders.

In addition, the principal's involvement in building relationships with government authorities is a vital aspect of the school's communication strategy (Artanti et al., 2024; Daud, 2023; Wulan et al., 2023). By actively engaging with government stakeholders, the school can gain greater support in achieving its educational goals and expand its networks and resources to better sustain school activities (Azizah et al., 2023; Maisaroh & Untari, 2024).

Finally, as an integral part of the public relations program, the principal holds the responsibility of setting the direction and key messages that align with the school's core values and objectives. By reinforcing the values embedded in the vision of the An Nahl Foundation Jambi, the principal ensures that all school communications are integrated with the established vision, creating consistency and continuity in the delivery of the school's messages.

From a communication perspective, the principal's communication strategy at SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi is not merely an effort to disseminate information, but rather a tool for building understanding, engagement, and active community support for the school's mission and goals. By utilizing effective and continuous communication, the school is able to create an inclusive, empowered, and student- and community-centered educational environment. (Siswadi & Putri, 2024).

Communication Management in Strengthening Community Relations at SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi

Communication management in strengthening community relations at SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi reflects a structured and integrated approach to handling

the school's communication aspects. The communication strategy implemented at the school is grounded in the school's branding foundation as defined by the An Nahl Foundation Jambi, which includes the concepts of "School of the Stars", "Caring for Friends", "Character-Based", and "Qur'an-Centered." This communication management is not solely the responsibility of the An Nahl Media Center, but also requires the full involvement of the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi, who operates under the structural authority of the An Nahl Foundation.

The implementation of communication processes aimed at strengthening community relations is monitored regularly through various methods, such as social media and weekly meetings. This ensures that the information delivered to the community remains relevant, accurate, and aligned with the vision and mission of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi. The evaluations conducted during the school's annual work meetings in collaboration with the An Nahl Foundation serve as a critical step in assessing the effectiveness of community communication activities and in determining future directions for improvement and development.

In the context of communication management theory, the approach adopted by the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi demonstrates a strong awareness of the importance of building a positive school reputation and enhancing community engagement. By applying this theoretical framework, the principal ensures that every step taken in managing communication with the community is measurable, well-directed, and aligned with the school's goals and core values as defined by its brand. As a result, effective communication management helps SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi strengthen relationships with various stakeholders, increase public trust, and support the achievement of the educational objectives set by the An Nahl Foundation Jambi.

Thus, communication management aimed at strengthening community relations is not merely a separate component of school activities, but a key element in supporting the overall success and growth of the school (Dozier et al., 2013; A. Rahmat & Husain, 2020). In this context, the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi has demonstrated a strong commitment to effective communication management, which serves as a vital pillar in establishing the school's position as a high-quality and trusted Integrated Islamic Educational Institution within the community.

The Strategy of the Principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi

The principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi implements a series of well-planned and purposeful strategies to strengthen the school's relationships with various stakeholders, including the community, educational institutions, parents, and government entities. The following is a more detailed narrative of the communication strategy approach used to enhance community relations, as applied

by the principal in building strong ties between SMPIT An Nahl and the wider community in Jambi Province:

First, the strengthening of school–community relations is carried out through a series of regularly organized social service activities. These initiatives not only serve as a platform for students to contribute to the community, but also enhance the image of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi as a caring institution that actively participates in promoting the well-being of its surrounding environment.

Second, to strengthen relationships with nearby educational institutions, the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi initiates various outreach and collaborative activities, including the organization of educational seminars, workshops, and student exchange programs with other schools. Through such collaborations, the school is able to expand its network and enrich students' educational experiences (Surur & Kuswandi, 2024).

Third, in an effort to strengthen relationships with parents, the principal and the foundation initiated the development of regulations aimed at enhancing communication and engagement. These efforts include orientation programs to introduce new parents to the school's culture and activities, as well as parenting programs designed to foster strong partnerships between the school and families. Additionally, the establishment of the *Forum Keluarga An Nahl* (An Nahl Family Forum/FKA) serves as an important step in providing a platform for parents to participate in school decision-making processes and support their children's educational journey.

The middle class, as active users of social media, is considered both a strength and a potential target for communication. Through relevant and interactive content, SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi is able to expand its communication reach and strengthen community engagement in school activities.

Next, the organization of special events—such as religious celebrations, school anniversaries, competitions, and charity events—serves as one of the key strategies to strengthen relationships with various stakeholders and the broader community. Such events not only enhance the public image of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi but also act as a medium for fostering closer ties with the surrounding public.

Support from the Indonesian Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT) is also utilized to expand the communication reach of the principal and the school's public relations team. Collaboration with other schools within the network helps to strengthen the school's position on a broader scale and provides greater access to resources and wider opportunities.

The regular use of social media, coordinated by the foundation's public relations team and supported by the school's various units, serves as an effective strategy for disseminating up-to-date and relevant information to the public. Through engaging and interactive content, SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi is able to maintain community engagement and foster positive relationships with a wide range of stakeholders.

Finally, strengthening relationships with the government is carried out through various initiatives, such as participation in government education programs, collaboration on educational initiatives, and involvement in policy discussion forums. Through close cooperation with government bodies, SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi is able to secure essential support in terms of regulations, resources, and facilities support that is crucial for achieving the educational goals set by the An Nahl Foundation.

Thus, the communication strategy implemented by the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi is not merely aimed at disseminating information, but also at building strong relationships, encouraging active engagement, and fostering sustained support from various stakeholders. These efforts form a crucial foundation for enhancing the quality of education and strengthening the school's position within the community (Wicaksana & Adiprabowo, 2025).

From the perspective of communication at SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi, there are several factors that support and hinder the effectiveness of communication between the public relations team, the principal, and the community.

1) Supporting Factors in Communication:

- a) The Foundation Chair's Commitment: The Foundation Chair demonstrates a strong commitment to effective communication, fostering a culture of open and constructive dialogue within SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi. The full support provided by the An Nahl Foundation Chair ensures that the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi has sufficient resources and backing to carry out their duties effectively.
- b) A Competent Public Relations Team: The presence of a skilled and experienced Media Center team at An Nahl is a significant asset to the school. This team is capable of managing social media, developing promotional materials, and organizing events effectively – ensuring that the school's messages are delivered clearly and efficiently to the public. Their expertise greatly supports the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi in strengthening communication and building strong relationships with the community.
- c) Utilization of Social Media: Leveraging social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube enables the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi to maintain broad engagement with the community. By sharing information about school activities and student achievements

through these platforms, the school is able to reach a wider audience and strengthen its positive image in the eyes of the public.

- d) Support from the Indonesian Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT): Support from JSIT Indonesia assists SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi in publicizing its achievements and enhancing the capacity of its public relations team. Through training programs and collaboration with other schools within the network, the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi is able to improve communication skills and expand the school's professional network.
 - e) Active Role of Parents: The active involvement of parents in communicating through social media helps disseminate information about the activities of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi and strengthens the relationship between the school and the wider community. Positive testimonials from parents also enhance the school's image in the public eye and attract the interest of prospective students and their families.
- 2) Inhibiting Factors in Communication:
- a) Weak Local Media Network: Limited access to or underdeveloped connections with local news media can hinder SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi's effort to publicize its activities and achievements to the broader community. This limitation may reduce the school's message reach and restrict the principal's efforts in promoting the school's image.
 - b) Inactive SIT An Nahl Jambi Website as a Primary Communication Channel: The school's website is either poorly managed or not regularly updated, which reduces its effectiveness as a primary communication channel between the school and the community. Outdated or incomplete information may lead to confusion and distrust among the public regarding the school's activities and achievements.

D. Conclusions

The findings of this study reveal that SMP IT An Nahl Percikan Iman implements a series of well-planned and purposeful communication strategies, including strengthening community relations through social service activities, collaborating with educational institutions, and encouraging active parental involvement. One of the key strengths in the principal's communication efforts at SMP IT An Nahl Percikan Iman lies in the involvement of middle-class parents, who actively support the school's programs and initiatives. The school's public relations program is also supported by the use of social media, participation in special events, and backing from the Integrated Islamic School Network. In the context of public relations management, this study finds that the commitment of school leadership, the presence of a competent Media Center team, and the use of social media as a primary communication channel are key supporting factors. However, several challenges remain, such as weak connections with local news media and the inactivity of the school's website as a main communication platform. Through a

thorough process and in-depth analysis, various aspects of the principal's communication strategy at SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi in building community relations have been successfully uncovered. The researcher hopes that this report will provide a valuable contribution to our understanding of the importance of effective communication in fostering harmonious relationships between schools, stakeholders, and the wider community. Furthermore, this study may serve as a foundation for developing more effective communication strategies in the future, not only for the communication strategy of the principal of SMPIT An Nahl Percikan Iman Jambi in building community relations, but also for other educational institutions.

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