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Research Article

Digital Public Relations and Family–School Communication in Indonesian Secondary Education: An Institutional Case Study

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Abstract

This study examines how State Senior High School 5 in Jambi City (SMA Negeri 5 Kota Jambi), Indonesia, organizes digital public relations and communication with families and community stakeholders. Methods: A descriptive qualitative case study drew on interviews, observations, and institutional documents. Results: The school combines semester-based planning, official website and social-media publications, parent WhatsApp groups, committee meetings, and principal-coordinated responses to misinformation. Available records report 4,969 Instagram followers and 2,567 TikTok users, but provide neither dated engagement trends nor direct measures of stakeholder perceptions. The analysis identifies eight organizational constraints: fragmented strategic planning, predominantly one-way messaging, uneven digital skills, limited evaluation, dependence on individual leadership, restricted use of analytics, weak external partnerships, and inconsistent visual identity. These findings suggest that digital outreach has developed faster than formal feedback and accountability mechanisms. Conclusion: The school has established multiple communication channels, but their contribution to public trust, equitable family participation, and student recruitment remains unmeasured. Priorities include clearer responsibilities, accessible feedback routes, communication staff development, and routine evidence-based evaluation.

Keywords: School Public Relations; Digital Communication; Family–School Engagement; Educational Governance; Institutional Accountability

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INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has moved the public identity of schools beyond periodic printed announcements toward continuous, publicly visible interaction with students, families, and surrounding communities. Research on educational branding suggests that social media can increase institutional visibility, but visibility alone does not establish the credibility of an educational service [1].

Studies of school-focused branding highlight the value of consistent messages, recognizable institutional identity, and meaningful stakeholder interaction [2]. Indonesian evidence likewise documents the use of Instagram and TikTok as channels for promoting school activities and inviting audience responses [3], while research in senior secondary education positions digital publication as an element of school image formation rather than a substitute for service quality [4]. Cases from Islamic schools indicate that reputation management also depends on responding to public concerns, maintaining transparency, and coordinating organizational action [5].

These observations place public relations within educational governance. Multi-site school research emphasizes institutional coordination and community relationships [6], and work on school–community management links communication to participation rather than promotion alone [7]. Educational leadership is especially consequential: associations between principals' collegial leadership and family engagement suggest that organizational relationships shape how schools connect with households [8].

The family–school relationship is a particularly important, yet methodologically demanding, outcome of digital communication. A systematic review identified promising but uneven evidence for technology-mediated parental engagement and warned against assuming that every digital message translates into improved student outcomes [9]. Critical scholarship also shows that official narratives of partnership may obscure unequal participation or disagreement [10]. School–home communication can contribute to the development of digital competencies [11]; however, the widespread use of parent chat groups creates its own demands around information flow, moderation, and boundaries [12].

Recent investigations of parents' experiences with school social media underscore the need to examine what connection means to families, not simply what institutions publish [13]. A systematic review identifies gender as a potentially important dimension of parental involvement [14], while studies of disability-related engagement reveal barriers that can prevent families from participating on equal terms [15]. The digital divide may intensify these barriers where connectivity, devices, or digital skills are unevenly distributed [16]. Therefore, a communication system should be assessed by accessibility, responsiveness, and accountability as well as reach.

Digital participation may also impose costs on school personnel. Research involving female teachers in Indonesian Islamic schools describes variation in social-media-related psychological strain and coping readiness [17]. Evidence on educational technology readiness documents unequal levels of preparedness that institutions must manage through training and organizational support [18]. Work on technology-mediated community communication further illustrates that the availability of digital channels does not in itself guarantee responsible

engagement [19]. These publications provide contextual insights; they are not evidence about the gender composition or wellbeing of personnel in the present case.

Within the broader education literature, parental involvement programmes have been associated with children's academic and social-emotional outcomes, although the strength of evidence and settings vary [20]. Studies of teachers' Facebook collaborations show how professional and community relationships may cross institutional boundaries [21]. A recent systematic review of parental involvement in digital learning similarly calls for attention to families' roles and constraints [22]. User-oriented digital interventions suggest that technology is more useful when designed around actual stakeholders and school practices [23]. Research linking family involvement and social-emotional development reinforces why educational communication should not be reduced to recruitment figures [24].

Against this background, State Senior High School 5 in Jambi City (SMA Negeri 5 Kota Jambi), Indonesia, offers a case through which to examine the coordination of digital publicity, family communication, and institutional accountability. The school maintains Instagram and TikTok accounts, convenes school committee meetings, and coordinates class-level communication through WhatsApp. However, the documented practices also reveal uneven digital competence, fragmented evaluation, substantial staff workloads, and a reliance on one-way announcements. The central question is how these activities function together as a communication system and whether claims about institutional reputation are supported by stakeholder evidence.

This study examines the planning and implementation of school public relations, the relationship between online and face-to-face communication, and the organizational constraints affecting responsiveness and evaluation. Its contribution lies in identifying the institutional conditions needed to move from routine publication to accountable family–school communication. Because comparable stakeholder surveys and outcome series were not available, the study does not estimate changes in public trust, enrolment, equity, or academic achievement.

METHODS

Research Design

A descriptive qualitative field-study design was used to examine public relations practices at one Indonesian public upper-secondary school. The school's communication management constituted the unit of analysis, with particular attention to planning, digital publication, family contact, feedback, and responses to emerging issues. The design was intended to characterize institutional processes rather than to establish causal effects.

Research Setting, Participants, and Sampling

The study was situated at State Senior High School 5 in Jambi City (SMA Negeri 5 Kota Jambi), an urban public upper-secondary institution in Indonesia. Purposive sampling focused on personnel with responsibilities for school communication, including the principal and the vice principal overseeing public relations, while the documentation also refers to student and family perspectives. The available records do not consistently identify the number or

composition of participants; accordingly, no total sample size or subgroup estimates are reported. Exact dates of interviews and field visits also remain unverified.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data collection involved in-depth interviews, direct observation of school communication practices, and review of institutional records and online publications. The documented sources included school profiles, organizational responsibilities, annual plans, the official website, social-media posts, and class or community communication arrangements. Complete interview transcripts, observation logs, interview protocols, and time-stamped platform datasets were not available for secondary checking; the analysis therefore does not introduce quotations, numerical series, or additional observations not contained in the research documentation.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The study describes qualitative data reduction, structured display, conclusion drawing, and comparison across interviews, observation, and documents. The findings are examined around governance, digital publication, family engagement, evaluation, and response capacity without generating additional codes or participant quotations. Source and method triangulation were described in the research documentation, but the documentation does not allow an independent assessment of saturation, inter-coder procedures, or participant validation. Methodological research shows that saturation depends on design and participant heterogeneity, rather than a universal sample-size threshold [25].

Ethical Considerations

The available methodological documentation does not identify an ethics-committee approval number or provide sufficient information on institutional permissions and interview consent procedures. Their status therefore cannot be verified from the current record. The presentation of findings avoids identifiable statements from students or parents and focuses on the school's organizational practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings concern eight organizational weaknesses and five stages of public relations management, summarized in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively. Reported school practices are distinguished from interpretations and proposed improvements. None of these descriptive findings constitutes a measured change in parental trust or institutional reputation.

Governance and the Planning–Implementation Gap

The school reportedly convenes beginning-of-semester coordination meetings led by the principal and involving the public relations function and other personnel. The meetings provide a basis for work-plan formulation, publication priorities, admissions-related announcements, and external relations. Yet the same field record identifies weak institutionalization of audience segmentation, communications objectives, consistent branding, and systematic follow-up. The apparent contradiction is best interpreted as a distinction between holding planning meetings and maintaining an integrated, documented strategic-communication system. Other school-based studies also draw attention to the difference between publicity activities and coherent communication management [26].

Table 1 groups the eight organizational findings and identifies practical priorities for addressing them. These priorities are interpretive recommendations rather than tested interventions. The distinction is important because a visible digital presence does not, by itself, demonstrate effective listening, equitable participation, or institutional accountability.

Table 1. Eight reported organizational findings and corresponding improvement priorities

No.	Reported institutional finding	Interpretive implication	Proposed action
1	Gap between strategic planning and operational implementation	Programs are not optimal, image is not consistently managed	Establish periodic monitoring and evaluation systems
2	Dominance of one-way communication	Reduced opportunity for dialogic engagement; trust not measured	Develop symmetrical two-way communication
3	Disparity in digital competencies among public relations staff	Uneven digital capacity; content quality not independently scored	Provide continuous digital literacy training
4	Immature evaluation and impact measurement mechanisms	Outcomes cannot yet be evaluated quantitatively	Develop measurable evaluation instruments
5	Dependence on charismatic leadership rather than institutional systems	Inconsistency, vulnerable to change	Develop institutional systems and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)
6	Low utilization of analytical data for decision-making	Decisions are not data-driven, less effective	Provide data analytics training and audience segmentation
7	Suboptimal collaboration with alumni and external partners	Untapped networking potential	Develop structured and sustainable collaboration programs
8	Inconsistency in branding and visual identity	Incoherent public perception	Develop integrated brand guidelines

Digital Publication and Stakeholder Access

The study records use of Instagram (@sman5kotajambi), TikTok, and the official school website to disseminate academic and extracurricular achievements, institutional announcements, events, and other activities. The available platform account records 4,969 Instagram followers and 2,567 TikTok users; these are time-unspecified snapshots, not audited indicators of reach, demographic representativeness, engagement rate, or improved institutional image. Its conclusion additionally reports approximately three to four posts weekly, without an accompanying longitudinal post log.

The strength of this approach is the provision of recognizable official information. Its limitation is that most described posts disseminate information rather than systematically solicit or act on stakeholder feedback. Studies of school communication distinguish the public value of accessible information from one-way promotional narratives [27]; more recent work on digital school–community narratives similarly emphasizes responsive communication and

coherent institutional identity [28]. In the present case, no evidence establishes the accessibility of content for people with disabilities, the language preferences of households, or comparable access among socioeconomic groups.

Family Communication, Response Capacity, and Feedback

The school reportedly uses semester-level committee meetings and WhatsApp groups coordinated at class level to communicate with families and respond to inquiries. These arrangements create potential channels for dialogue, especially where concerns can be escalated from classroom contacts to the public relations team. The available documentation does not include a sample of parent messages, a response-time dataset, or systematically collected satisfaction measures. Therefore, claims of increased parental loyalty or trust cannot be treated as established results. Research on institutional public relations stresses that apparent loyalty requires evidence of sustained relationships rather than message volume [29].

The school also describes a rapid principal–public relations coordination practice in response to misinformation. The study characterizes the procedure as operating within one 24-hour period. In the absence of a documented incident register, the figure is reported here as a described managerial target/practice, not as a verified mean response time. Studies of reputation in the post-truth information environment highlight the importance of consistent and evidence-based institutional responses [30].

Workload, Competence, and Incomplete Evaluation

The field findings associate implementation difficulty with public relations staff simultaneously performing teaching duties, uneven digital skills, limited use of analytics, and dependence on principal-level coordination. They also identify a gap between occasional monitoring of comments and systematic evaluation of whether different groups understand and can use school information. Historical evidence from school–community management shows the importance of relationships that extend beyond discrete publicity campaigns [31]. Recent work on the challenges of educational public relations similarly discusses organizational capacity, role clarity, and sustainable communication planning [32].

The field documentation also refers to trends in the new student admissions process (Penerimaan Peserta Didik Baru, PPDB). However, annual applicant totals, relevant denominators, changes in admission rules, and comparable historical figures are unavailable. An increase in enrolment or public trust therefore cannot be established. Future evaluation should distinguish process indicators (publishing frequency, accessibility checks, and response times) from stakeholder outcomes (comprehension, satisfaction, and perceived fairness) and administrative outcomes (applications and enrolment).

Table 2. Reported school public relations activities and plausible monitoring indicators

Management stage	Reported activity	Suggested monitoring indicator
Planning	Beginning-of-semester meetings, annual program development, and PPDB targets.	Existence and completeness of approved plan, audience and responsibility matrix
Digital Implementation	Publication of achievement content on Instagram, TikTok, and the school website.	Time-stamped publication inventory; reach and accessibility audit
Social Implementation	Coordination via parent WhatsApp groups and committee agendas.	Feedback response records, themes, and participation by channel
Crisis Management	Rapid internal coordination and the release of official, data-based clarifications.	Issue and verification log; elapsed time to approved public clarification
Evaluation	Analysis of social media feedback and PPDB applicant graphs.	Repeated stakeholder feedback and PPDB figures interpreted with context

Discussion

From Promotional Visibility to Reciprocal Accountability

The case is best understood as an unfinished shift from promotional school publicity to accountable service communication. Schools have reasons to present achievements and a recognizable identity, but a credible institutional image also depends on whether parents and students receive useful answers, whether difficulties are acknowledged, and whether commitments become routine procedures. Research on contemporary school public relations highlights the relationship between consistent messaging and external trust [33]; evidence from madrasah settings associates meaningful parental engagement with service quality and institutional participation [34]. The present study contributes by separating these possible mechanisms from outcomes not directly measured.

Digital Inclusion and Unequal Family Participation

The access dimension deserves particular attention in an education and social welfare context. Households may not experience official social-media accounts in the same way, especially where digital resources, time, literacy, and confidence differ. Evidence from low-income families documents unequal access to educational technology [35], while qualitative studies of digital parent–teacher communication show how platform practices can privilege some forms of participation [36]. Research on socioeconomic barriers to family engagement confirms that simply offering communication channels does not resolve structural constraints [37]. Contextualized strategies have therefore been recommended for families in urban schools who face different opportunities to participate [38]. Because this case did not collect disaggregated family data, these findings justify a future inclusivity audit rather than a claim that exclusion has already occurred at SMA Negeri 5.

Leadership, Staff Capacity, and Institutional Continuity

Organizational leadership provides a second interpretive mechanism. A coordination culture driven by a committed principal can enable rapid action but may remain fragile if responsibilities, escalation pathways, and evaluation routines are not institutionalized. Research differentiating horizontal and vertical trust links leadership practice to collective school culture [39], and work on empowerment and professionalism identifies trust as a relevant organizational pathway [40]. For the present school, written operating procedures, backup personnel, clear sign-off rules, and a shared feedback register would reduce dependency on individual availability.

The third mechanism is digital competence without excessive communication workload. Research on developing learning media for Islamic schools demonstrates that technology initiatives require systematic design and formative evaluation [41]. In the communication setting examined here, staff development should include fact-checking, plain-language editing, safeguarding, accessibility, complaint handling, and responsible analytics, rather than concentrating only on content production. Practice-oriented work on culturally sustaining home–school contact also underscores why schools should consider offline and relational pathways alongside social platforms [42].

Building an Evidence-Informed Communication Evaluation Cycle

A feasible evaluation cycle would start with a register of key audiences and common questions, then record information publication, response handling, and feedback by channel. The school could conduct short voluntary stakeholder feedback exercises, test whether published information is understandable, and examine response times without identifying minors. Studies linking parent–teacher communication to student motivation illustrate the relevance of interaction quality [43], while a systematic review of online parental engagement identifies the importance of role clarity and support across home, school, and technology environments [44]. These are recommendations informed by external literature, not retrospective descriptions of procedures verified at this school.

Overall, the case illustrates the distinction between a school that communicates frequently and one that can demonstrate the quality and consequences of its communication. The presence of official platforms and leadership support provides a useful starting point, but limited feedback documentation and analytics constrain conclusions about improved public image. Future institutional reviews should assess accessibility, representation, staff workload, and the handling of stakeholder concerns without equating follower counts with educational quality.

CONCLUSION

State Senior High School 5 in Jambi City combines semester-level planning, official social-media publication, family coordination, and principal-led clarification of public information. The findings also identify eight constraints involving strategy, dialogue, staff competence, evaluation, leadership dependence, data use, external partnerships, and branding consistency. These practices indicate an active communication infrastructure, but not yet a fully documented system for listening to stakeholders and evaluating service quality. More

accountable communication will require assigned responsibilities, accessible feedback channels, routine analysis, and workable staff procedures. Improvements in reputation, family trust, or admissions cannot be inferred from the available descriptive evidence and should be assessed through direct stakeholder feedback and longitudinal records.

LIMITATIONS

This single-school study is constrained by incomplete documentation of fieldwork dates, participant composition, verbatim interview material, and ethical approvals or consent procedures. Social-media audience figures and posting frequency are not accompanied by dated platform records, and measures of stakeholder perceptions and administrative outcomes are unavailable. These limitations restrict transferability and prevent conclusions about changes in trust, equity of family participation, or educational service quality. Further research should combine traceable platform data with voluntary and accessible stakeholder feedback, staff workload records, and appropriately authorized subgroup analyses.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

M.J., S.R.J, A., and A.r. contributed to the research and the preparation of this manuscript. The three authors share responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the published work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

Generative AI tools, including ChatGPT, were used to assist with language editing, structural organization, and reference formatting. The authors are responsible for verifying all sources, arguments, and editorial changes and for approving the final manuscript.

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