

Public Relations Communication Of The Nusantara Student Dormitory (AMN) Surabaya In Promoting Scholarship Programs To New Students From 3T Regions

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the Public Relations (PR) communication strategies implemented by the Nusantara Student Dormitory (Asrama Mahasiswa Nusantara - AMN) Surabaya in promoting national affirmation scholarship programs to incoming university freshmen originating from Indonesia's frontier, outermost, and least developed regions (3T -Tertinggal, Terdepan, Terluar). Utilizing James E. Grunig Excellence Theory as an analytical framework, this research explores how a newly established institutional PR department navigates multi-layered administrative boundaries and severe regional socioeconomic disparities to foster inclusivity. A descriptive qualitative methodology was employed, harvesting primary data through semi-structured in-depth interviews with the AMN PR administrator, senior management, and scholarship recipients from 3T territories including Papua, Maluku, and Nusa Tenggara, cross-validated by continuous digital content analyses. The findings reveal that AMN Surabaya successfully operationalizes a "Distributed Public Relations Model" to counter critical staffing shortages, effectively transforming every operational employee and dormitory mentor into an active institutional brand ambassador. Furthermore, the PR unit successfully bridged deep-seated psychological barriers among remote student populations such as low self-efficacy and digital anxiety by heavily integrating interactive two-way symmetrical communication ecosystems across digital mediums, complemented by localized cultural adaptations and peer-led, face-to-face field campaigns. However, structural challenges persist, particularly regarding an asymmetric distribution of information that leans heavily toward certain geographical regions and structural friction regarding intra-institutional role definitions. This research provides significant empirical and theoretical enrichment to the understudied domain of educational public relations tasked with executing high-stakes affirmative social campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

The Higher education functions as the foundational cornerstone for bolstering the collective quality of human resources, empowering a developing nation to thrive within an increasingly competitive global economy. In spite of this national ambition, Indonesia's expansive geographic nature as an archipelago presents persistent systemic barriers. Achieving equitable academic accessibility and

ensuring the distribution of comprehensive educational facilities to students across highly diverse regional, economic, and social backgrounds remain formidable governance challenges. This critical developmental imbalance is felt acutely by young populations residing in the nation's 3T areas (Tertinggal, Terdepan, Terluar signifying Least Developed, Frontier, and Outermost regions). For these youth, severe institutional infrastructure deficits

combined with structural household economic vulnerabilities act as restrictive barriers, prematurely cutting off opportunities to pursue undergraduate degrees at major metropolitan university hubs.

Beyond these primary physical and socioeconomic constraints, the intricate dynamics of cultural, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity within prominent urban university campuses demand precise, systematic attention. The extreme socio-cultural diversity characteristic of Indonesian state universities frequently generates subtle social frictions, underlying threats of ethnic discrimination, and potential horizontal conflicts if not proactively governed through an institutional framework centered on cultural integration and unified national identity cultivation. In direct response to these compounding socio-political issues, the Government of Indonesia acting through a collaborative coalition of ministries and state intelligence bodies launched a strategic national housing and educational initiative, establishing the Asrama Mahasiswa Nusantara (AMN) scholarship program in Surabaya. This specialized institution is structurally designed not merely as a localized financial subsidy or basic student boarding house, but rather as an active incubator for national unity, cross-cultural diplomacy, and structured character development centered around the unifying principle of Wawasan Nusantara.

Institutionally, the AMN Surabaya scholarship program operates in direct partnership with four premier public state universities (Perguruan Tinggi Negeri - PTN) situated within East Java: Universitas

Negeri Surabaya (Unesa), Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember (ITS), Universitas Airlangga (Unair), and Universitas Pembangunan Nasional (UPN) "Veteran" Jawa Timur. Charged with a targeted mandate to facilitate educational equity, AMN Surabaya is positioned as a national model for integrated institutional promotion within contemporary higher education. A key institutional mechanism differentiating AMN from standard academic scholarships is its strict administrative mandate requiring all recipients to live inside the residential facility and complete a mandatory two-year national character and leadership training curriculum. According to institutional policy directives, the annual student intake quota is strictly segmented, allocating 60% of available seats explicitly to incoming freshmen from verified 3T territories, while the remaining 40% is drawn from urban student cohorts

already admitted into the four affiliated public universities. From its official launch in late 2022 through 2025, the residential facility has accommodated approximately 700 diverse scholarship students, systematically putting them through its rigorous socio-cultural development curriculum.

Letting dynamic public outreach shape information networks, allocating a commanding 60% quota to youth from marginalized 3T territories introduces massive operational complexities into the institution's information dissemination networks. Because AMN Surabaya represents a high-profile manifestation of national multicultural cohesion, the promotional narratives crafted to engage these populations must look past standard admissions statistics. Instead, they must communicate a clear, empowering message: that youth from the most isolated segments of the republic possess equal intellectual and social rights to excel within elite urban public universities. This narrative requirement is critical given that AMN Surabaya is a high visibility National Strategic Project involving multi-agency state actors; hence, every piece of public communication directly impacts the broader integrity and public reputation of government-led national integration efforts.

Empirical evidence underscores that basic financial relief alone cannot guarantee academic integration. Incoming freshman cohorts from 3T zones face a dual institutional shock: acute economic strain combined with intense, paralyzing culture shock upon arriving in a sprawling metropolitan center like Surabaya. Without an intentional, integrated communication and psycho-social support system embedded right from the initial recruitment phase, the risk of students falling into protective, exclusionary ethnic clustering remains high. Further psychological barriers persist, visible as low self-efficacy among youth in disadvantaged territories. A large percentage of these potential applicants view elite higher education in urban centers as culturally and socially unattainable. Standard digital scholarship advertisements are frequently misinterpreted as highly exclusive opportunities meant only for individuals possessing advanced digital literacy and urban social capitals. This perceptual disparity forms an internal mental wall, preventing high-potential 3T students from attempting the application process. This issue is exacerbated by digital anxiety, as applicants from technologically starved regions routinely experience immense

confusion and fear when forced to navigate complex online selection portals.

To systematically dismantle these structural and psychological barriers, the active intervention of professional Public Relations practitioners is mandatory. These specialists must deliver communication frameworks that are highly responsive, accessible, and explicitly designed to reduce applicant anxiety. During moments marked by profound technical and administrative confusion, the delivery of clear, immediate communication builds institutional trust. Conversely, slow, bureaucratic responses broaden information gaps, causing irreparable damage to the institution's public image. Beyond operating as a functional information conduit, Public Relations within this specialized context must actively cultivate a positive institutional image, broadcasting core principles of radical inclusivity to the wider public. Strategic, empathetic communication is required to reassure distant families that metropolitan state universities are safe spaces for cultural diversity, where indigenous tribal identities and varying religious beliefs are celebrated as intellectual assets rather than socio-cultural barriers.

The operational necessity of structured Public Relations management within higher education is strongly validated by contemporary communication literature, which demonstrates that methodical PR outreach exerts a direct, statistically verifiable influence on prospective student enrollment choices. Research indicates that without well-coordinated promotional and educational campaigns backed by both legacy mass media and digital platforms, even heavily funded, state-backed scholarship initiatives fail to engage their primary targets. It was precisely at this critical structural junction that the formal Public Relations unit of AMN Surabaya was officially established in 2023. This strategic intervention was intended to transition the institution away from basic administrative messaging toward highly proactive, strategic communication that alleviates applicant stress and delivers real-time guidance. When a PR framework delivers rapid, solution-oriented answers to technical hurdles encountered by distant applicants, it dramatically elevates the external credibility of and public trust in the organization.

Furthermore, this dedicated PR unit was created to optimize promotional reaches that were previously managed by a general administrative office with limited outreach capacity, which had proved unable to

penetrate deep regional territories. The formal establishment of the PR unit in 2023 marked an institutional shift in how scholarship availability is publicized within 3T zones moving past the pursuit of enrollment numbers to focus on ensuring information accuracy and regional equity. Operationally, AMN Surabaya implemented a comprehensive outreach strategy incorporating direct, face-to-face informational roadshows executed across rural provinces and within the four host universities in Surabaya. This direct engagement method aims to project AMN's image as an empathetic, modern institution focused on educational equality and cultural preservation. Through this direct field presence, the institution seeks to safeguard the sustainable lifecycle of its data streams, ensuring it is evenly absorbed by prospective applicants.

However, despite executing direct field roadshows, maintaining digital platforms, and leveraging institutional partnerships, a noticeable gap between strategic goals and field realities persists. This discrepancy indicates that specific communication stages are not yet optimized, particularly regarding the creation of localized, segmented messaging, the diversification of communication channels, and the execution of collaborative synergy among all institutional stakeholders. Consequently, information dissemination remains highly asymmetric, with public awareness clustering heavily in urban areas or moving slowly through narrow personal networks. This structural disconnect reveals a fractured communication chain where the PR framework cannot reliably convert initial digital interest into completed applications due to low interactive engagement within its primary digital channels.

This operational problem is further complicated by internal institutional challenges, including an acute shortage of certified, expert communication personnel, uneven management support, and restrictive infrastructural budgets. This combination of internal technical and structural limitations ultimately generates profound psychological and socio-cultural barriers for target populations located in peripheral zones. These external vulnerabilities are worsened by low digital literacy, physical geographic isolation, and severe telecommunications infrastructure deficits that characterize daily life in 3T regions. The inability of current communication styles to reliably overcome these geographic and digital divides results in an expansive information chasm. This pattern of

asymmetric information flow demands a rigorous, critical evaluation of the historical communication strategies deployed by AMN Surabaya. There is a pressing institutional need for a highly structured, data-informed, and culturally sensitive communication framework. Public Relations communication can no longer be relegated to a passive administrative function; it must actively execute integrated pull, push, and pass strategic frameworks by pairing modern social media ecosystems with collaborative field events to generate deep, lasting public engagement. Through the deployment of highly optimized communication architectures, state-backed educational scholarships can effectively serve as instruments of social soft power, boosting institutional competitiveness while cultivating highly favourable public perceptions.

To date, rigorous empirical investigations dissecting the Public Relations communication strategies of AMN Surabaya in promoting scholarship accessibility specifically to 3T student cohorts have been non-existent. This critical scholarly vacuum makes the current study highly necessary. Academically, this research aims to enrich the existing body of literature regarding public relations management within higher education and affirmative national scholarship contexts. Practically, the empirical insights generated are intended to serve as a vital evaluative tool for AMN Surabaya executives, providing actionable data to design communication frameworks that are structurally inclusive, highly responsive, and capable of engaging grassroots populations across marginalized territories. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the Public Relations communication strategies implemented by AMN Surabaya in promoting scholarship accessibility for students from Indonesia's 3T (Least Developed, Frontier, and Outermost) regions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior Studies

Prior empirical studies provide an essential baseline for modern researchers, serving as a comparative foundation to determine institutional trajectories while anchoring the explicit originality of current scientific inquiries. To establish a rigorous grounding for analyzing the Public Relations communication of AMN Surabaya, several relevant studies spanning corporate public relations,

educational marketing, digital media campaigns, and affirmative policy actions were examined. The first critical study evaluated is entitled "Implementation of the Gerbang Cerdas Mahulu (GCM) Scholarship Program as a 3T Educational Affirmative Policy in Mahakam Ulu Regency" (Boimau et al., 2025). This research carefully analyzed the execution of affirmative educational policies targeting marginalized youth within Frontier, Outermost, and Least Developed regions, focusing on Mahakam Ulu Regency, East Kalimantan. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, that study operationalized the Van Meter and Van Horn Policy Implementation Model, assessing six core structural variables: policy standards, resource availability, inter-organological communication, implementer dispositions, macro socio-economic conditions, and inherent policy characteristics. The core findings demonstrated that affirmative scholarship frameworks are vital to boosting higher education enrollment rates within 3T territories where physical access is choked by broken infrastructure and economic divides. Specifically, that study documented a 25% reduction in student dropout rates achieved through synchronized financial backing and structural mentorship. However, it also identified major hurdles, specifically low self-efficacy among isolated youth who view metropolitan universities as culturally unattainable, paired with informational deficits caused by low digital literacy. This alignment matches Albert Bandura's self-efficacy framework, which notes that peripheral individuals experience heightened performance anxiety due to a lack of urban exposure.

Clear commonalities exist between Boimau et al.'s work and this current investigation into AMN Surabaya's PR communications. Both research initiatives stem from a shared academic and social concern regarding structural imbalances in information and academic access affecting peripheral populations, focusing on potential applicants within 3T regions. This commonality reinforces the societal urgency of affirmative interventions to repair national educational gaps. Nonetheless, substantial differences separate the two studies. Boimau et al.'s research focuses on the policy implementation mechanics of a local government unit, tracking budget allocations and inter-departmental coordination at a regional level. In contrast, this current study evaluates the communication public relations architecture of AMN

Surabaya as a collaborative entity operating across four major urban public universities, with a dedicated mission to build national integration through a specialized residential curriculum.

The second foundational study reviewed is "Public Relations Strategy of IFI Surabaya in Building Brand Awareness" (Amalia, 2024). This study dissected the public relations strategies executed by the Institut Français Indonesia (IFI) Surabaya to strengthen its institutional image and public brand awareness, specifically in promoting French cultural assets, language programs, and international academic pathways. Employing a descriptive qualitative methodology, Amalia gathered primary data via semi-structured interviews with the IFI PR team, paired with rigorous content analyses of promotional media, press releases, and offline events. That study anchored its analysis in James E. Grunig's Excellence Theory of Public Relations, tracking the execution of the Press Agency/Publicity model, the Public Information model, and the Two-Way Asymmetrical model. The findings revealed that combining these distinct communication models yielded a 40% increase in institutional brand awareness, measured through digital media engagement metrics and audience surveys, driven by systematic influencer collaborations and hybrid cultural events.

The convergence between Amalia’s study and this current inquiry into AMN Surabaya lies in the shared analytical focus on institutional public relations strategies within a cultural and educational organization. Both studies utilize robust qualitative designs to map out communication tactics including digital media deployments and experiential events to achieve core organizational goals, namely public awareness and stakeholder participation. Furthermore, this convergence highlights the utility of Grunig's Excellence Theory as a resilient analytical framework for deciphering non-profit institutional communication. However, distinct differences emerge regarding audience demographics and theoretical adaptations. The IFI Surabaya study focuses on cultivating brand awareness within a highly urbanized, digitally literate metropolitan audience, where the primary PR hurdle is content competition. In contrast, this study on AMN Surabaya investigates a complex communication landscape targeting highly isolated, marginalized 3T populations, where the primary PR challenges involve overcoming deep geographical

isolation, severe digital divides, and systemic socio-cultural exclusion across the Indonesian archipelago.

Tabel 1. Literature Review

Research er & Year	Research Focus	Methodology & Theory	Core Findings & Divergences
Boimau et al. (2025)	Implementati on of affirmative scholarship policies (GCM) in 3T regions (Mahakam Ulu).	Qualitative descriptive approach; Van Meter & Van Horn Policy Implementati on Model.	Found a 25% drop in student attrition. Identified low digital literacy and poor self-efficacy as key barriers. Diverges from this study by focusing on policy administration rather than strategic PR communicatio n.
Amalia (2024)	Public Relations strategies to drive brand awareness for a cultural-academic institute (IFI Surabaya).	Qualitative descriptive approach; Grunig's Excellence Theory of Public Relations.	Proved a 40% boost in institutional awareness via hybrid events and targeted digital media. Diverges by focusing on urban consumer groups rather than marginalized, isolated 3T student demographics .
Current Study (2026)	Public Relations communicati on of AMN Surabaya in promoting affirmation scholarships to 3T students.	Qualitative descriptive approach; Grunig's Excellence Theory (Distributed & Symmetrical models).	Maps out a unique Distributed PR Model combined with two-way symmetrical digital ecosystems to resolve severe geographic and socio-cultural exclusion divides.

Excellence Theory in Public Relations

To analyze the communication public relations architecture of AMN Surabaya, this study relies on the Excellence Theory in Public Relations, originally formulated by James E. Grunig, Larissa A. Grunig, and David M. Dozier. This theory is an expansive, globally recognized paradigm resulting from a comprehensive, multi-year research initiative evaluating public relations practices within corporate, non-profit, and governmental institutions. The core tenet of Excellence Theory asserts that for public relations to contribute to organizational success, it must be positioned as a core strategic management function rather than a simple, reactive administrative tool. The theory systematically outlines four models of public relations behavior based on direction (one-way versus two-way) and intent (asymmetrical versus symmetrical): (1) Press Agency/Publicity, (2) Public Information, (3) Two-Way Asymmetrical, and (4) Two-Way Symmetrical communication.

Within the analytical boundaries of this study, specific emphasis is placed on the Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Model and its structural modern adaptation, the "Distributed Public Relations Model." The two-way symmetrical model uses communication to negotiate, manage conflict, and cultivate mutual understanding between an organization and its key stakeholders. Unlike asymmetrical models that focus on altering public behavior to suit institutional desires, symmetrical communication emphasizes mutual adaptation, transparency, and ethical engagement. In an educational context tasked with executing affirmative social campaigns, this model requires an institution to listen to the anxieties and physical constraints of its public, integrating these insights back into its core operational strategies.

Furthermore, this study utilizes modern developments within Excellence Theory that address severe personnel and resource scarcities, leading to the conceptualization of the "Distributed Public Relations Model." In organizations marked by a low headcount of dedicated PR practitioners, the responsibility for managing public relationships shifts away from an isolated department. Instead, it is intentionally distributed across all levels of the institutional workforce. Under this framework, every employee, field worker, and residential mentor is structurally

upskilled and authorized to function as an active institutional brand ambassador. The centralized PR professional ceases to operate as the sole content producer, transforming instead into a high-level strategic architect, quality gatekeeper, and internal communication coach. This distributed approach ensures that relational management remains highly agile, culturally adaptive, and capable of operating across expansive socio-geographic boundaries.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative research approach to generate an intensive, contextualized understanding of the Public Relations communication strategies executed by AMN Surabaya. Qualitative inquiry is uniquely suited for this investigation as it allows the researcher to explore complex institutional communication processes, human interactions, and socio-cultural dynamics within their natural setting. Rather than reducing organizational behaviors to isolated statistical metrics, a descriptive qualitative design focuses on answering "how" and "why" questions, preserving the authentic voices, lived experiences, and distinct perspectives of institutional actors and marginalized scholarship recipients.

Research Site and Timeline

The empirical research was conducted at the Asrama Mahasiswa Nusantara (AMN) Surabaya, located in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. Data collection, field observations, and informant interviews were systematically carried out over an extended period extending into May 2026. This research site was selected due to its unique institutional profile as a high-visibility National Strategic Project specifically mandated to house and train university students from highly diverse, multi-ethnic backgrounds, with a mandatory 60% quota reserved exclusively for youth from the nation's 3T regions.

Research Subjects and Informants

Informants for this study were selected using a deliberate purposive sampling technique to guarantee that all participants possessed deep knowledge of the communication frameworks under evaluation. A total of six informants participated in this study. The primary informants were strategically segmented into three distinct institutional layers to

facilitate comprehensive multi-perspectival triangulation:

1. Management & PR Administration Layer: Including the primary Public Relations Administrator of AMN Surabaya (Informant 1), who holds direct operational responsibility for content creation, digital media management, media relations, and institutional partner coordination, alongside Senior Management Officials (Informant 2) responsible for high-level promotional policymaking, budget mapping, and institutional direction. This group was selected because they are directly responsible for designing, implementing, and evaluating the institution's Public Relations communication strategies.
2. Operational & Mentorship Layer: Comprising Residential Dormitory Mentors (including Informant 4), who maintain daily, direct contact with the students and participate directly in localized outreach campaigns. This group was selected because they are actively involved in the implementation of communication activities and interact directly with scholarship recipients during the mentoring process.
3. Scholarship Recipient & Beneficiary Layer: Comprising incoming freshman scholarship recipients and active alumni originating from verified 3T territories, including student cohorts from the Papua region (such as Informant 3, a Communication Science freshman from the Pegunungan Bintang Regency), Maluku territories (such as Informant 6 from the Kepulauan Sula Regency), and East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). This group was selected because they represent the primary target audience of AMN Surabaya's communication strategies and can provide first-hand experiences regarding the effectiveness of the promotional and information dissemination process.

Data Collection Techniques

To ensure high data reliability, primary and secondary data were gathered through three integrated techniques:

1. In-Depth Interviews: Conducting semi-structured, individual in-depth interviews

using comprehensive, open-ended question guides. Interviews were conducted both through face-to-face interactions and secure digital video conferencing channels (such as Zoom and Google Meet) to accommodate informants across various geographical locations. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

2. Field Observations: Executing systematic, passive observations of AMN Surabaya's digital communication channels, tracking daily engagement practices on institutional Instagram profiles, official TikTok accounts, and dedicated WhatsApp help desks.
3. Documentary Studies: Evaluating official institutional records, scholarship guidebooks, application registration procedures, media content plans, and formal administrative reports regarding annual applicant registration statistics.

Data Analysis Techniques

The empirical qualitative data were analyzed using an adapted Thematic Analysis Framework, progressing through four systematic phases: data reduction, data display, data condensation, and conclusion drawing. Following data transcription, the text was thoroughly parsed to isolate recurring patterns, operational challenges, and distinct strategic choices. These elements were systematically organized into conceptual codes, which were subsequently clustered into higher-order thematic categories matching the core principles of Excellence Theory, thereby ensuring a tight link between empirical field findings and the theoretical framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Distributed Public Relations Model: Mitigating Resource Scarcity

A primary finding of this study reveals that AMN Surabaya operates its communication public relations function under severe resource and staffing constraints. Structurally, the institution employs only one single dedicated, formal Public Relations professional who bears total accountability for media relations, digital content generation, storyboard development, technical filtering, and community management. Within standard corporate public relations frameworks, a 1:700 practitioner-to-stakeholder ratio would trigger systemic

communication failures. However, empirical data demonstrates that AMN Surabaya successfully addresses this structural challenge by operationalizing a highly creative "Distributed Public Relations Model."

Rather than isolating public relations within a single understaffed department, senior management issued a strategic mandate transforming the entire institutional workforce into active communication assets. The Director of AMN Surabaya explicitly required all administrative staff, library workers, security officers, and residential dormitory mentors to serve as official institutional brand ambassadors. Under this model, the formal PR practitioner (Informant 1) shifts away from standard daily execution to become a strategic communication architect, quality gatekeeper, and internal upskilling coach. The PR administrator maintains absolute structural authority over content strategy, designing detailed "content plans" and storyboards that must receive final executive sign-off before publication, thereby ensuring strict quality control.

This distributed model effectively converts internal staff into decentralized public relations agents. For example, residential mentors and student affairs staff are regularly tasked with generating basic localized updates, drafting preliminary event reports, and producing initial visual content assets. This approach allows the institution to maintain an active, multidimensional public presence despite its limited formal PR staff, suggesting that collaborative internal communication can compensate for limited organizational resources while maintaining institutional visibility. However, in-depth interviews also revealed underlying structural friction within this model. Several operational employees expressed clear resistance, noting that public relations duties were not explicitly included in their original job descriptions, frequently stating, "this is not my core job, why am I required to execute it?" This internal pushback underscores a critical gap between high-level administrative strategies and operational workforce cultures, which indicates that successful implementation of distributed public relations depends not only on structural delegation but also on employee acceptance and organizational commitment. The internal stabilization of PR values therefore requires ongoing structural support, which management is currently addressing through targeted professional communication and multimedia editing workshops.

Two-Way Symmetrical Digital Ecosystems: Overcoming Psychological Barriers

A significant obstacle impeding scholarship applications from 3T regions is a set of deep psychological barriers, notably low self-efficacy and severe digital anxiety. Prospective students from rural regions often view elite metropolitan state universities in Surabaya as socially and culturally unapproachable. Furthermore, the mandatory requirement to navigate complex, online-only application portals frequently induces severe tech-related anxiety among candidates who lack consistent internet access or regular exposure to modern digital systems.

To dismantle these psychological barriers, AMN Surabaya's PR unit systematically constructed a highly responsive, interactive two-way symmetrical communication ecosystem across its digital platforms. The institution transformed its Instagram and TikTok profiles from static, one-way information boards into active spaces for conversational dialogue. The PR unit heavily integrated the Live Instagram feature to host regular interactive broadcasts, providing distant applicants with real-time access to clear up administrative confusion. Furthermore, the PR administrator carefully tracked recurring, automated queries left within comment sections and direct message folders. These inputs were systematically synthesized to generate targeted, user-friendly digital content assets, such as specialized Q&A carousels and step-by-step explanatory video clips.

This digital strategy was directly paired with a rapid-response WhatsApp help desk system. By delivering immediate, solution-oriented guidance for technical issues encountered during the online registration process, the PR framework successfully alleviated applicant panic and cultivated deep institutional trust. The empirical effectiveness of this symmetrical approach is validated by testimonies from active 3T scholarship recipients. For instance, Informant 3, an incoming freshman from the isolated Pegunungan Bintang Regency in Papua, explicitly noted that his initial anxiety regarding the application process was resolved through direct, supportive interactions with the AMN PR team. The delivery of welcoming, clear, and immediate guidance across digital channels served as the decisive factor that gave him the confidence to complete his scholarship enrollment. These findings indicate that two-way digital communication functions not only as an information delivery mechanism but also as a means

of reducing psychological barriers and strengthening trust between the institution and prospective students, thereby supporting the effectiveness of symmetrical communication practices.

Intercultural Communication and Field Outreach: Redefining Outreach in 3T Territories

While digital communication channels proved effective for tech-literate populations in developing areas, they remained insufficient for reaching candidates in deeply isolated 3T zones suffering from severe telecommunications blackouts. To address this geographic divide, AMN Surabaya's PR unit executed an aggressive intercultural communication strategy centered around direct, localized field campaigns. The institution recognized that successful communication within highly isolated areas requires strict alignment with local cultural practices and community structures.

Before deploying field outreach teams to remote provinces such as East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), Maluku, and specific regencies across Papua the PR unit partnered with local municipal networks and regional education boards to map out local communication dynamics. The most effective tactical innovation within this strategy was the mobilization of active dormitory students and alumni to serve as localized public relations volunteers during academic break periods. When these student volunteers returned to their home villages, they acted as living cross-cultural links. By conducting face-to-face informational sessions using local languages, familiar accents, and relaxed narrative styles, they easily bypassed the skepticism often directed toward institutional outsiders.

The critical psychological impact of this physical presence is highlighted by Informant 6, a scholarship recipient from the Kepulauan Sula Regency in Maluku Utara. He emphasized that direct field visits by AMN personnel made rural students feel "embraced" and "deeply valued." In communities that historically experience geographic and social marginalization, the physical arrival of university representatives conveys a powerful symbolic message that their presence is genuinely desired. This finding suggests that intercultural communication becomes more effective when institutional messages are delivered through culturally familiar interactions and trusted community representatives, thereby increasing message acceptance among underserved populations. This face-to-face approach successfully humanized rigid

administrative requirements, transforming them into accessible, encouraging narratives. Prospective applicants were highly motivated by video testimonials from older peers, which provided them with a clear visual blueprint of daily life and academic success within the metropolitan dormitory facility.

Critical Evaluative Analysis: Addressing Information Asymmetry and Inequities

Despite these documented strategic successes, a critical evaluation of AMN Surabaya's public relations framework reveals notable structural imbalances that require immediate attention. In-depth interviews with scholarship students from minor provinces highlighted a persistent pattern of information asymmetry across geographic territories. Several informants, particularly those from Maluku Utara, noted that promotional campaigns and institutional responsiveness appeared heavily skewed in favor of specific regions, notably Papua, leaving other eligible 3T territories underrepresented and underinformed.

Informant 6 explicitly detailed this regional disparity, noting that while applicants from Papua received rapid institutional responses and dedicated administrative attention, students from minor 3T provinces like Maluku Utara often felt marginalized within the institutional communication network. This perception of uneven attention created an internal barrier, causing minority students to feel that their voices and structural needs were less likely to be prioritized by management. These findings imply that communication effectiveness should be evaluated not only by the volume of outreach activities but also by the perceived fairness and inclusiveness experienced by different stakeholder groups. Because the institution lacked a formal, structured channel for anonymous student feedback, minority recipients were often hesitant to voice critiques directly to senior management, relying instead on informal personal relationships with select mentors who shared their regional backgrounds.

This regional imbalance presents a significant risk to the long-term reputation of AMN Surabaya. Under Grunig's Excellence Theory, an institutional failure to align high-level ethical commitments with the daily, lived experiences of minority stakeholders creates a dangerous disconnect. If internal stakeholders perceive a gap between the institution's public narrative of total inclusivity and its actual operational practices, the core credibility of its

promotional outreach is undermined. To safeguard its national mandate, AMN Surabaya must implement systematic changes: diversifying its field outreach budgets to ensure equal visibility across all 3T provinces, establishing formal and transparent internal communication channels, and developing highly localized, segmented media narratives that reflect the full diversity of its target populations.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Public Relations unit of AMN Surabaya has successfully developed an agile, strategic, and culturally adaptive communication framework to promote its national affirmative scholarship programs despite limited human resources. The findings indicate that the implementation of a Distributed Public Relations Model, supported by two-way symmetrical digital communication and intercultural field outreach, contributed to improving communication effectiveness and expanding engagement with prospective students from 3T regions.

Nevertheless, the study also identifies continuing challenges related to regional information asymmetry and internal resistance to additional public relations responsibilities. These findings suggest that strengthening internal communication support, ensuring more equitable outreach across 3T regions, and maintaining consistent stakeholder engagement may further enhance the effectiveness of AMN Surabaya's public relations management.

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