UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA TO BUILD PRIVATE UNIVERSITY'S BRAND IMAGE (A STUDY AT UNIVERSITAS TARUMANAGARA PUBLIC RELATIONS)

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ABSTRACT

Several factors become the preferences of prospective students in choosing a university, one of which is the university's brand image. It is also necessary to use social media to build a brand image nowadays because it currently has many users. Various social media platforms can also be used today, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and TikTok. This study mainly aims to figure out to find out how and why Untar, as a private university, builds brand image through social media while trying to answer did they succeeded in conveying their brand images through social media? This qualitative descriptive research discusses both theory and practice from Untar regarding digital communication, public relations, social media, and brand image. The data obtained is from researchers' observations since 2020 equipped with interviews with sources directly involved in managing Untar's social media. Since the Covid-19 pandemic hits Indonesia, Untar has utilized social media platforms to convey its brand images. Research shows that in order to build its brand images to the audience, Untar did careful planning, execution, checking, and thorough implementation. They carried out this strategy consistently for almost 2 years so that every detail displayed on their social media post can provide added value for the university. Research also shows that Untar has succeeded in utilizing social media to convey the brand image of Untar well to a broad audience.

Keywords: Brand image, public relations, private university, social media

1. PREFACE

In 2020, the good news in private universities came from information about the increasing quality of university education in Indonesia, as seen from the success of 30 Private Higher Education (PTS) accredited "A" from National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT). In addition to this, the increasing quality of education is also strengthened by the consistently increasing academic ranking of private universities in the national and international arena. Then, out of 30 private universities in Indonesia, 8 are private universities from Jakarta.

Private higher education managed to absorb 113,587 new entrants from 144,094 new entrants [1]. That is certainly good news for private universities because they have achieved greater potential for new entrant absorption. It can be seen that the competition between private universities is even more interesting if you look at the large number of prospective new entrants who reach hundreds of thousands each year.

Choosing a university is, of course, more complex when compared to selecting a product. This is due to the future value that needs to be considered. Unfortunately, there are some similarities when choosing a university, especially a private university. The number of prospective new students will form a reference through several levels and then select based

on their interests. Several factors influence student references in choosing a university, including reputation, costs, academic quality, facilities, location, and social life [2].

Meanwhile, Adha and Irawan [3] stated that the university's brand image influences student references in university selection. As fierce competition demands organizations or institutions to create a competitive advantage. In this condition, the brand image will help the institution/organization on the external side differentiate the types of products or services from one another. In addition, various factors can influence university selection decisions, and prospective students can also be identified by referring to the theory of consumer behavior. Kotler and Keller [4] state that four main factors influence consumer behavior, namely: (a) Cultural Factors, (b) Social Factors, (c) Personal Factors, and (d) Psychological Factors.

Aside from that, as social media popularity grows over time, now it is becoming one of the channels that have millions of users. Social media getting more and more popular among universities and also took a major part in conveying their brand image through their posts, including Universitas Tarumanagara (Untar). Therefore, the first objective of this research is to figure out to find out how Untar as a private university builds brand image through social media. The second objective is to figure out why Untar was increasing its utilization of social media, and lastly to measure its success in conveying Untar's brand image through social media.

2. BACKGROUND

Private universities have taken the proper steps by competing to improve academic quality and reputation, as evidenced by the many private universities accredited as "Excellent" in Jakarta. However, in the future, with the increasing number of "A" accredited universities in Jakarta, a new problem will arise, namely the blurring of the lines of distinction between private universities. Because of this new problem, private universities need to have added value by forming the right brand image to stand out from competitors and attract prospective university students' interest. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the brand image to influence the decisions of prospective new students, one of which is the use of social media. Within the institution/organization, the public relations (PR) division has the role and responsibility to provide complete information and answer the audience's needs through publications to build a reputation and bond with the institution/organization. To support this, the PR division needs to find the best publication channels for publication to reach a broad and targeted audience.

In carrying out the role and purpose of public relations, namely building a brand image and forging bonds within an institution/organization, Untar has an Untar Public Relations Office. This goal can also be achieved by publishing various non-digital and digital channels. This is also supported by the fact that the institution (Untar) needs the media to be more known. At the same time, the media also needs news material from the institution. Considering the developments in the digital world, Untar needs to maximize publications by using other publication channels. Through the public relations division of Untar, Untar also uses digital media to publish. In 2013 Untar started using the website and social media platforms Twitter and Facebook, followed by Instagram and YouTube platforms in 2015, and TikTok in 2021 to support publication activities to promote brand image, existence and build bonds with Untar's internal and external audiences.

To maximize performance in the digital world, in 2020, Untar Public Relations began to optimize social media and website optimization 2021. Since the author started his tenure in early 2020, Universitas Tarumanagara social media, managed by Untar Public Relations, has carried out overall optimization in stages and compiled various strategies to improve Untar's brand image. Through these multiple optimizations, it is hoped that optimization can become a digital strategy for Untar Public Relations in enhancing brand image and forming strong bonds with audiences in the digital world.

With this background, the researcher who had the opportunity to become the Social Media Manager in the Public Relations Division of Untar did a final project entitled Utilizing Social Media to Build Private University's Brand Image (A Study at Universitas Tarumanagara Public Relations).

3.   RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher used a qualitative approach with a case study method. This study uses a qualitative approach because the problem is related to observation-based humans. Moleong[5]argues that qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena experienced by the research object by describing language and forms of language, such as behavior, perception, motivation, and action.

This descriptive research was conducted to find answers to existing problems and conclude events according to the studied events. Descriptive research is a method to gain extensive knowledge of an object of research in a particular situation by not adding, subtracting, or manipulating existing variables[6]. In this study, researchers used qualitative descriptive to find out how or the process of private universities building a brand image through social media required data that could not be obtained from quantitative research and required interpretation of the meaning of the researcher. The subject in this study is the Public Relations of Universitas Tarumanagara. Researchers used two data research techniques to collect data, each to obtain accurate data based on the environment (observation). The data collection techniques used by researchers were observation and interview techniques.

4.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The researcher started the observation since the researcher started working at Public Relations Untar on February 1, 2020, as the Social Media Manager of the Untar Jakarta account. Observations were made during this period by paying close attention to the activities carried out by the researcher. The data obtained during the work are then analyzed and used to complete the research. The primary data is direct data obtained during the research period and supported by interviews to help the preliminary data.

From the observations in early February, researchers found that most of Untar's official digital communication channels are currently managed by Untar's Public Relations. The various digital platforms used by Public Relations Untar to conduct digital communications to the internal and external public are as follows: (a) website with the address www.untar.ac.id, (b) email/email to the address humas@untar.ac.id, (c) digital magazines and newsletters under the names T-Magz and Insta, and (d) Untar's social media account.

At the beginning of a more profound observation of the social media used by Untar, Untar seemed to use three hashtags, namely: (a) #UNTARuntukINDONESIA to show the brand image that Untar as one of the oldest, the biggest and one of the best Private Higher Education in Jakarta is committed to building Indonesia; (b) #untarjakarta to show that Untar is located in Jakarta, and; (c) #untar, which stands for Universitas Tarumanagara, this hashtag aims to instill the popular nickname of Universitas Tarumanagara into the audience so that it is easier to remember, mention, and search for.

However, there has been no focused effort to develop Untar's social media, even though Untar's social media seems to show that Untar is an active private university. This is evidenced by the strong dominance of news content from activities organized/participated by Untar interspersed with the content of celebration remarks and the achievements of Untar and students at that time.

Therefore, Untar started to optimize social media in stages, starting from rearranging the overall strategy and redefining Untar's target audience, namely at the age of 17 years and over, which is the average age of students when taking the undergraduate program. This gradual optimization of social media aims to maximize publication performance, increase the number of audiences, and, most importantly, convey the university's brand image to the audience.

After getting to know the target audience well, the optimization carried out in February 2020 was on the content starting from the addition and rearrangement of the content pillars, namely engagement, promotion, and activation/news based on the target. The engagement content pillar creates a close relationship with the audience and builds a friendly and fun image. Then the promotion pillar aims to promote Untar either indirectly or directly and contains content such as scholarship information, why you should choose Untar, and so on. The last pillar is news/activation, which aims to provide event information through content such as the news from events that have been carried out or posters from upcoming events.

At the same time, optimization of language in social media is also carried out, be it in content copywriting, content caption writing, or in replying to messages from the audience in the comments column. From observations, it can be seen that Untar's social media uses Indonesian and English interchangeably to live up to a brand image of internationalism. Semi-formal or informal communication builds closeness with the targeted audience. In addition, Untar's social media also uses a communication style, namely assertive communication, to reply to incoming messages from the audience. This aims to carry out effective communication when Untar gets criticism or complaints through social media and can convey messages properly and respect the opinions and beliefs of the sender of the message.

Then the upload schedule of Untar Jakarta's social media content also changed. The results of the researchers' observations in early 2020 showed that there was no regular schedule, as seen from the absence of a unique editorial plan for social media or commonly referred to as a social media plan. Therefore, in February, Untar made a social media plan and started designing and scheduling the content on the plan sheet. Although there is no direct impact on Untar's brand image, this social media plan helps Untar's social media team measure or track the effectiveness of uploaded content. Each content can be seen for its consistency in displaying its brand image.

The last optimization that Untar carried out in February was to maximize the use of features on the Instagram and Facebook Untar Jakarta social media platforms by using stories. This story feature can be found on the two platforms and is a feature that allows Untar to upload photos or videos of a short duration (15 seconds) and will only appear for 24 hours. The purpose of utilizing this story feature is to gain more reach and attract leads to websites listed in the swipe-up feature. Through the story feature, Untar can create more real-time, authentic, creative, and high-interaction content with the audience through various features embedded in it.

The entry of the Covid-19 virus into Indonesia in March 2020 prompted Untar to reactivate the Untar Jakarta YouTube platform to display various programs owned by Untar directly or indirectly. The Untar Jakarta YouTube channel, which only had 119 subscribers (then on November 28, 2021, it was recorded to have had 3,340 subscribers), did a live stream for the first time on May 22, 2020, to inaugurate the 126th new doctors and also the 76th graduation ceremony.

In September 2020, researchers found the urgency of Untar's social media team to tidy up the visuals on Untar's social media so that the content uploaded by Untar has its characteristics. In addition, there is also the activation of a new hashtag, namely #KampusMerdekaIndonesiaJaya, which is the tagline of the program initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology) in 2020. This is a commitment and proof of Untar's readiness to contribute to government programs and is an effort from Untar to form an image that Untar has closely synergized with the government to promote education in Indonesia.

This visual optimization begins with a uniform design style and feeds layout design on the @untarjakarta Instagram account. This consistent design style includes using Untar's identity colors, namely maroon, white, and gray, to strengthen the three colors' association with Untar digitally. Then also the placement of Untar design elements, namely the Untar logo on the top left, the accreditation logo on the top right, and the *UNTAR untuk INDONESI*A on the bottom right, along with the addresses of various Untar digital platforms at the bottom left so that each uploaded content carries Untar's identity and characteristics. Then on September 22, 2020, the Untar Jakarta Instagram account started planning the layout of the Instagram feed, which aims to form a professional image to improve the neatness and credibility of the Untar Jakarta account.

In addition to the content category, in February 2021, Untar also increased response time and interaction in replying to messages on social media by adding two personnel responsible for handling incoming messages on social media every day, including holidays. This is so that each audience gets a good, fun, and fast experience when communicating on Untar's social media either through direct messages or in the comments column. This optimization also has another goal: to improve a professional image but remain close to the audience. In mid-February, Untar decided to increase the intensity of uploading content on Untar's social media to 7 contents in 1 week (at least one content per day) on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter platforms. This increase in intensity aims to make the audience always accompanied by content from Untar's social media every day and can describe Untar's brand image as a constantly active campus.

In March 2021, Untar's social media content pillars grew with Untar academics who published scientific articles in the Untar Compass Column for Indonesia. The new pillar is an article pillar containing article content from academics at Untar. It has been repackaged so that a broad Untar audience can visually take the essence of scientific articles through design and captions. Then the high intensity of news from Untar's events resulted in the news content being no longer accommodated for upload on the main Instagram social media page. Therefore, in May, the contents of this news pillar were moved to the story feature and highlighted so that content could be accessed on the @untarjakarta Instagram page for more than 24 hours.

Entering the new academic year in the odd semester in August 2021, Untar has again refreshed the design display. It is known that the design style uses a Memphis / urban design style and uses more flexible fonts such as handwriting so that the appearance of Untar's social media is more attractive, fresh, and suitable for Untar's audience, the majority of whom are young individuals. This change in design style was also carried out to fulfill the brand image that Untar wanted to form, which is contemporary, flexible, and full of energy.

Design elements were also considered uniform again to continue to carry Untar's characteristics. Namely the Untar logo on the top left, the *Kampus Merdeka* logo on the top right, Untar's social media addresses on the bottom left, and the *UNTAR untuk INDONESIA* tagline on the bottom right. Then in September, towards the age of 62, Untar added the 62-year-old Untar logo just to the right of the Untar logo in the top left corner. It aims to show that Untar's reputation has stood the test of time as one of the oldest private campuses in Jakarta. In November, Untar added the *Merdeka Belajar* logo to the right of the *Kampus Merdeka* logo to show that Untar had implemented MBKM in lecture activities.

To make Untar's social media more interactive and live, Untar also launched personas or characters from Untar Jakarta admins in the same month, namely MinDre, MinCal, MinSar, and SuperMin. The formation of these four characters has a function to become the identity of the admins when responding to interactions so that the audience knows whom they are interacting with.

On August 23, 2021, Untar introduced Untar's newest social media account, TikTok, where the platform will produce short videos. The content made on TikTok Untar Jakarta has an external target audience as educational content in the form of tips that are rarely known, especially in the field of education, engagement content in the form of games or things related to student life, and promotional content to introduce Untar to the audience.

From the results of observations in early 2020, it was found that Untar's largest audience was on the Instagram platform, with a total number of 11,396 followers. After a continuous optimization process, observation data on November 28, 2021, shows that the Instagram platform continues to be the favorite of the Untar audience. One of the evidence to this statement comes from the high increase in the number of followers, which is 94.92% (10,817 followers), and until the observation date the @untarjakarta Instagram account is recorded to have 22,213 followers.

Then to see how many audiences saw Untar Jakarta's content, for 90 days, from June 22 to September 19, 2021, the researchers took samples of social media data on Instagram @untarjakarta. Data on Instagram shows that in those 90 days, there were 2,663,031 (2.66 million) times Untar Jakarta content appeared on Instagram user profiles, 82,862 account

reach (±18.2 thousand followers, 64.5 thousand non-followers), 133,022 profile visits, 6,890 taps to the website, and the highest engagement rate on July 4, 2021, at 16.7%.

Discussion
Untar Digital Communication Channels
Digital communication can build a two-way relationship and increase satisfaction with a brand [7]. In addition, digital communication is also known to have a positive effect on the brand image[8], therefore there is a need for interactive communication to get a positive brand image[9].

While the Untar's digital communication continues to grow now. Interview result found that one of the driving factors for this growth was the Covid-19 pandemic which ultimately encouraged Untar to be present digitally. Based on observations, it was found that Untar's Public Relations currently manage Untar's official digital communication channel. Then the results from the interview with the Untar Public Relations Officer are also in line with the researchers' observations where both of them stated that in 2021 Untar through Untar Public Relations was seen actively using four digital channels, namely websites, e-mail, online magazines (TMagz and Insta), and social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok).

These digital channels are utilized to convey information to internal and external audiences. Then as an effort to keep up with the times and the audience, these channels continue to experience changes as long as they can improve the performance of delivering information and brand images from Untar.

The Establishment of Untar Public Relations Office to Improve Brand Image
The results of the researcher's observations show that in 2013, Untar, as a private university formed a Special Unit for Public Relations at Universitas Tarumanagara to build reputation and ties to institutions/organizations (later to become the Untar Public Relations Office in 2020). The task of the Untar Public Relations Office is to establish good relations with internal and external audiences and actively provide information to the public regarding the development of the university, both academic and non-academic, while improving and maintaining Untar's brand image.

The interview results show that all efforts and activities carried out by Untar Public Relations must refer to Untar's vision and mission, which is to become an entrepreneurial campus with an international reputation. The activities in question are activities organized by Untar independently or with partners. Before and after these activities, information was disseminated through digital and conventional media owned by Untar and media partners to maximize audience reach. The observation results show that through this publication on social media, Untar Public Relations has succeeded in bringing achievements, namely the award as a Private University with the Best and Most Productive Public Relations at LLDIKTI Regional Office III in 2020 and also a prize for Higher Education With the Best Social Media Performance Report at LLDIKTI Regional Office III in 2021.

Utilizing Social Media to Improve Brand Image
Raji *et al*. [10] said that excellent use of social media would create a good impression on the brand image. This is reinforced by the high use of social media in this digital era. Good social media can be a good face for institutions in the digital world and can be the right tool to boost

reputation. Besides that, good social media content can also be a powerful tool to increase bonding with the audience.

From observations and interviews, it can be seen that Untar has five official social media accounts, namely Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok. Meanwhile, from observations, it appears that Untar has carried out various stages of social media optimization since early 2020. Agrawal [11]states that social media optimization is a technique to improve social media performance to present promotions or build a brand in different social media channels. Adriani *et al.* [12] argue that all public relations activities are a form of maintaining brand image. The changing communication environment has also changed the practice of public relations.

The researcher's observations show that Untar, as a private university, has utilized social media and carried out various social media optimizations to develop a brand image. Most of the optimizations carried out by Untar lead to efforts to improve the brand image, such as the preparation of the content pillars that are currently owned appears to be following the four pillars of social media strategy used on the theoretical basis [13]. In addition, optimizations such as language, upload schedules, efforts to increase interaction, increase response time, compile content categories are carried out to maintain content quality, and take advantage of the work of social media platform algorithms to maximize the formation of positive images.

In terms of design, design optimization also seems to be in line with brand image theory which states that brand image is formed by creating brand awareness to become familiar and gain recognition from the audience [4]. The formation of personas from admins is also by Untar's need to be close to the audience to maximize brand image delivery. However, apart from improving quality, optimization of increasing content intensity was also carried out and succeeded in increasing the productivity of Untar's publications on social media. The effect of increasing the power of this content is that Untar's social media successfully reaches millions of audiences every month.

Although, in general, all the efforts made by Untar have an effect in building a positive brand image through social media, the researchers also found several things that were less than optimal from Untar's social media. The first primary concern is that no digital advertising is provided by the social media platform itself, such as Google Ads, Facebook Ads, Instagram Ads, and TikTok Ads. From the collection of observation data, interviews, and analysis of Untar's leading social media since 2020, Untar has developed organic social media and is known to have never used this advertising service. Meanwhile, various data show that these advertising service providers complement their services with intelligence (algorithms) based on big data and enable Untar to reach a larger audience who are suitable and have great potential to become university applicants.

Then the second thing that is a concern to improve is the need for cross-platform content diversification. In addition to content formats in the form of videos or photos, the platforms used by Untar, be it Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Tiktok, have the character and age range of the majority of their users. Currently, Untar seems to have similar posts on three of the five platforms used: Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Seeing the differences that each platform has, Untar should create different content according to the character and age range of users on each platform in the future.

Untar's Brand Image That Is Conveyed in Social Media

At a university, brand image is a manifestation of the institution's characteristics that distinguish it from others, which reflect its ability to meet student needs, instill confidence in its ability to offer a specific type and level of higher education, and a prospective future. It can help recruits make admission decisions [14] because students choose universities based not only on the program or location but also on the institution's establishment, which becomes an essential part of the brand image. Developing a university's brand image has also become an integral part of the higher education context because it enhances student experience and understanding of its values and establishments [15].

The observations and interviews show that from February 2020 to November 2021, Untar has succeeded in using social media to convey various images. These multiple images include Integrity, Professionalism, and Entrepreneurship, which are the pillars of Untar. Also, the idea of a leading campus to build Indonesia, historical, national, and international reputation, friendly, fun, full of knowledge, active, credible, consistent, authentic, creative, supportive, full of achievements, socially engaged, care about others and the environment, in line with government programs, helpful, always available in providing services, close to the audience, up-to-date, flexible, full of energy, and prioritizes MBKM. If it is matched with six factors that influence student references in choosing a university [2], then 5 of these factors have been conveyed by Untar through social media content. Elements shared through Untar's social media include reputation, academic quality, facilities, location, and social life on campus.

5.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research founds that the Covid-19 pandemic is one of the factors that has pushed Untar to improve digital communication, one of which is through social media. To answer how exactly Untar communicates its brand images on its social media, careful planning, execution, checking, and thorough implementation is needed and carried out consistently so that every detail displayed can provide added value for the university. In maximizing the use of social media to build a brand image, Untar as a private university able to take advantage of advertisements provided by social media platform providers such as Google, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok Ads. In addition, Untar can also readjust the content on each platform to make it more appropriate and relevant to the audience on each platform. To measure Untar's success in communicating its brand images, the data from 2020 to 2021 shows that Untar as a private university has successfully utilized social media organically to convey its brand image to tens of millions of audiences through its consistent social media optimization strategies.

Acknowledgement

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