

Public Relations Strategies in Increasing the Interest of Prospective New Students: A Study at SMKN 1 Gunungkencana, Lebak Regency

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: October 2023 Accepted: October 2023 Published: October 2023	This study aims to analyze the public relations (PR) strategy in increasing prospective student interest at SMK Negeri 1 Gunungkencana. The research employed a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Research informants consisted of the Principal, Head of Public Relations, Head of the Accounting and Financial Institution Program, and Head of the Automotive Engineering Program. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the school's public relations strategy was implemented through four main stages: identifying opportunities and problems, program planning, communication implementation, and program evaluation. The strategies included strengthening the school image through the "SMK Kencana Kemilau" branding, conducting promotional visits to junior secondary schools, utilizing social media and the school website, developing entrepreneurship programs, and establishing partnerships with business and industrial sectors. The most attractive public relations program for prospective students was the Industrial Work Practice (Prakerin) program, as it provided real-world work experience and opportunities to obtain competency certificates from partner companies. The study also found that the school's primary opportunities included its strategic location, an accreditation status, and qualified human resources. Meanwhile, the major challenges were increasing competition among schools, limited public understanding of vocational education, and certain infrastructure constraints. This study concludes that a well-planned public relations strategy, supported by flagship programs and effective communication media, plays a significant role in building a positive school image and increasing prospective student enrollment interest.
Keywords: Public Relations Strategy, School Image, Prospective Student Interest, Vocational Education, Vocational High School	

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main instruments in the development of quality human resources. Through education, individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to adapt and contribute to social life and the world of work. In the context of national development, educational institutions not only function as a place for knowledge transfer, but also as a means of character formation and to increase the competitiveness of society. Therefore, every educational institution is

required to be able to provide quality educational services while building public trust in its existence.

The increasingly competitive development of the world of education has encouraged every educational institution to make various efforts to attract the interest of prospective students. Competition not only occurs between public and private schools, but also between schools that have the same level of education. This condition requires schools to have an effective communication strategy in introducing excellence, programs, and the quality of educational services to the community. In this situation, the public relations function (PR) is very important as a communication bridge between the school and the external public, especially prospective students and parents.

According to Ruslan (2017), public relations is a management function that aims to build and maintain a harmonious relationship between an organization and its public through planned and sustainable communication. In educational institutions, public relations plays a role in building a positive image of the school, disseminating information on educational programs, and increasing public trust in the quality of schools. This role has become increasingly strategic because prospective students' decisions in choosing schools are not only influenced by academic factors, but also by public perception of the reputation and credibility of educational institutions.

In today's digital era and information disclosure, people are increasingly selective in determining school choices for their children. Parents and prospective students tend to seek information about the quality of education, school facilities, academic and non-academic achievements, graduate job opportunities, and career development prospects after completing their education. Therefore, schools are required to be able to manage public communication effectively in order to build a positive image and increase attractiveness in the midst of increasingly fierce competition.

Vocational High School (SMK), as a vocational education institution, has its own challenges in attracting the interest of prospective students. In contrast to public high schools, vocational schools are required to show the relevance between the educational process held and the needs of the business world and the industrial world. The success of vocational schools in building public trust is greatly influenced by the school's ability to demonstrate the quality of graduates, industry partnerships, field work practice programs, and job opportunities available to students after graduation. Therefore, public relations strategy is one of the important factors in increasing public interest in choosing vocational education.

SMKN 1 Gunungkencana is one of the public vocational high schools located in Lebak Regency, Banten Province. As a vocational education institution, this school has various excellent programs designed to improve the competence of students, such as Field Work Practice (PKL), Skill Competency Test (UKK), Special Job Exchange (BKK), guest teachers from the industrial world, and cooperation with various agencies and companies. These various programs have potential that can be used as

a promotional medium as well as a means of building a positive image of the school in the eyes of the public.

In addition, the success of SMKN 1 Gunungkencana in obtaining superior accreditation shows that there is an improvement in the quality of education management, which can be an added value in attracting the interest of prospective new students. However, the existence of other schools that also offer various advantages has led to increasingly fierce competition in obtaining new students. This condition requires schools, especially the public relations department, to be able to design and implement effective communication strategies so that information about school excellence can be well received by the community.

Based on the results of initial observations, the public relations of SMKN 1 Gunungkencana have carried out various promotional activities, such as socialization to junior high schools, distribution of brochures, installation of promotional media, use of social media, and cooperation with various parties to expand the reach of school information. However, the effectiveness of this strategy in increasing the interest of prospective new students still needs to be studied in more depth. In addition, it is necessary to know which strategies are the most dominant in attracting public attention, as well as the various opportunities and challenges faced by public relations in carrying out its duties.

Research on public relations strategies in educational institutions has been carried out extensively. However, most of the research focuses more on aspects of education promotion in general or school communication management. Studies that specifically explore vocational public relations strategies in increasing the interest of prospective new students, especially in rural areas such as Lebak Regency, are still relatively limited. In fact, the social characteristics of the community, access to information, and geographical conditions can affect the effectiveness of communication strategies implemented by schools. This research gap shows the need for a more in-depth study of public relations practices in the context of vocational education.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the public relations strategy of SMKN 1 Gunungkencana in increasing the interest of prospective new students, identify the most dominant strategies used, and examine the opportunities and challenges faced in its implementation. The results of the research are expected to contribute to the development of educational communication studies, especially in the field of public relations, as well as become evaluation and recommendation material for educational institutions in designing more effective communication strategies to increase the attractiveness of schools in the midst of increasingly competitive educational competition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Relations Strategies in Educational Institutions

A strategy is a series of decisions and actions that are systematically designed to achieve organizational goals in the long term. Chandler (1962) defines strategy as

determining the basic goals of an organization as well as the allocation of resources needed to achieve them. In the context of *public relations*, strategy is a guideline in planning, implementing, and evaluating communication programs that aim to build positive relationships with the public.

In educational institutions, public relations strategies not only function as a means of disseminating information but also as an instrument to build school reputation, increase public trust, and strengthen the position of schools in the midst of competition between educational institutions. Therefore, the success of a public relations strategy is largely determined by the organization's ability to identify public needs, formulate the right message, and choose effective communication media.

Smith (2017) explained that public relations strategies are developed through several stages, namely *formative research*, strategy planning, communication program implementation, and evaluation of results. These stages allow the organization to gain a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of the target public so that the designed communication program can achieve the expected goals.

Public Relations

Public relations is a management function that aims to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and the public. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2013) stated that *public relations* is a management function that is responsible for creating harmonious relationships between organizations and groups that influence the success of the organization.

In the educational environment, public relations has a strategic role as a liaison between schools and the community, parents, the business and industry world, and other stakeholders. Public Relations is in charge of conveying information about school programs, student achievements, and various activities that can improve the image of the institution in the eyes of the public.

Seitel (2017) emphasized that the main functions of public relations include communication management, organizational image formation, relationship management with the public, and management of issues that have the potential to affect the organization's reputation. Thus, public relations is not only oriented towards the delivery of information, but also seeks to create public understanding and trust in the organization.

Public Relations Strategies in Increasing the Interest of New Students

Competition between educational institutions encourages schools to develop effective communication strategies to attract the interest of prospective students. From the perspective of marketing educational services, schools are seen as organizations that offer educational services to the community, so they need a promotional strategy that is able to build positive perceptions and increase the attractiveness of the institution.

Kotler and Fox (1995) explained that educational marketing includes various communication activities that aim to introduce the excellence of institutions to the public. These activities can be carried out through direct promotion, media publications, social activities, and strengthening relationships with the surrounding community.

In vocational high schools (SMK), public relations strategies are generally realized through various excellent programs that are oriented towards the work readiness of graduates. Programs such as Field Work Practices (PKL), Special Job Exchanges (BKK), Skill Competency Tests (UKK), industrial visits, and cooperation with the business and industrial world (DUDI) are important means in building the image of the school as an institution that is able to produce job-ready graduates.

The existence of these programs can increase public trust because it shows the relationship between the educational process and the needs of the world of work. Thus, a public relations strategy that prioritizes the excellence of school programs has the potential to increase the interest of prospective students in continuing their education at the school.

Interest of Prospective Students

Interest is the individual's tendency to pay attention and become involved in an object that is considered interesting and valuable. According to Slameto (2015), interest is a sense of liking and interest in an activity without any coercion from other parties. Interest arises as a result of the interaction between the needs of the individual and the information he receives from the environment.

In the context of school selection, the interest of prospective students is influenced by various factors, including the reputation of the school, the quality of education, learning facilities, job opportunities after graduation, parental recommendations, and information obtained through school promotion activities. Therefore, an effective public relations strategy can contribute to shaping positive public perceptions so as to encourage interest in choosing a particular school.

The Image of Educational Institutions and Their Influence on Enrollment Interest

Image is the public perception of an organization that is formed through experience, information, and communication that is received on an ongoing basis. According to Jefkins (2018), organizational image is the result of the accumulation of public assessments of organizational identity, performance, and communication.

In the education sector, the image of the school is one of the important factors that influences the decision of prospective students and parents in choosing an educational institution. Schools that have a good reputation tend to have a higher level of trust than schools that are less well-known to the public. Therefore, public relations has a strategic responsibility to manage organizational communication consistently so that a positive image of the school can be formed and maintained.

Research Conceptual Framework

This research departs from the assumption that public relations strategy plays an important role in increasing the interest of prospective new students. Public relations strategies are realized through various communication and school promotion programs, such as socialization activities to junior high schools, publications through social media, implementation of Field Work Practices (PKL), Special Job Exchanges (BKK), Skills Competency Tests (UKK), industrial visits, and cooperation with the business world and the industrial world.

These programs are expected to be able to build a positive image of the school in the eyes of the public. The positive image that is formed will increase public confidence in the quality of the school, thereby encouraging an increase in the interest of prospective students to register at SMKN 1 Gunungkencana.

Conceptually, the relationship between variables in this study can be explained as follows:

*Public Relations Strategy → Positive Image of the School → The Interest of
Prospective New Students*

The conceptual model is the basis for analyzing how the public relations strategy of SMKN 1 Gunungkencana contributes to increasing the interest of prospective new students.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the public relations strategy (PR) implemented by SMKN 1 Gunungkencana in increasing the interest of prospective new students. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore social phenomena naturally based on the perspective of informants who are directly involved in school public relations activities (Sugiyono, 2019).

The paradigm used in this study is constructivism, which views social reality as the result of the construction of individual experiences, interactions, and meanings of their environment. Through this paradigm, the researcher seeks to understand how public relations strategies are designed, implemented, and interpreted by the actors involved in the process of accepting new students.

The research was carried out at SMKN 1 Gunungkencana, Lebak Regency, Banten Province. The selection of the research location was based on the consideration that the school actively runs various public relations programs to attract the interest of prospective students in the midst of increasing competition between secondary education institutions.

Research Informant

The research informants were selected using *the purposive sampling technique*, which is the deliberate selection of informants based on the consideration

that they have knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the implementation of the school's public relations strategy (Purwanto, 2007). The research informants consisted of:

No	They report	Departments
1	Asep Kuntoro	Principal
2	Aunt Apriyanti	Head of Public Relations
3	Mansur	Head of the Financial and Institutional Accounting Expertise Program (AKL)
4	The Goddess of Love Augustine	Head of the Automotive Light Vehicle Engineering Expertise Program (TKRO)

Data Collection Techniques

The research data was collected through three main techniques, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation.

Observations are carried out in a participatory manner to obtain an overview of public relations activities, school socialization processes, and various programs used to attract the interest of prospective students. Through observation, researchers can understand the situation and conditions of the field directly.

In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with all research informants. This technique is used to explore information about the public relations strategy implemented, the school's flagship programs, supporting and inhibiting factors, and informants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies implemented.

In addition, documentation is used to complete the data from observations and interviews. The documents analyzed included school profiles, new student admission data, documentation of public relations activities, promotional brochures, social media publications, and documents of school cooperation with the business and industrial world (DUDI).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out interactively using a model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consisted of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

- 1) Data reduction is done by selecting, grouping, and simplifying data that is relevant to the focus of the research.
- 2) The presentation of data is carried out in the form of a systematic narrative description, which makes it easier for researchers to understand the patterns and relationships between findings.
- 3) Conclusions are drawn and verified on an ongoing basis throughout the research process to ensure that the findings obtained have a strong empirical basis.

Data Validity Test

The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation techniques and triangulation methods. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from various informants, while method triangulation is carried out by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation. This technique aims to increase the credibility and validity of research findings.

With this approach, this research is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive overview of the public relations strategy of SMKN 1 Gunungkencana in increasing the interest of prospective new students and the factors that affect their success.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Public Relations Strategy in Increasing the Interest of Prospective New Students at SMK Negeri 1 Gunungkencana

The results of the study show that the public relations strategy of SMK Negeri 1 Gunungkencana in increasing the interest of prospective new students is carried out through four main stages, namely: (1) identification of opportunities and problems, (2) program planning, (3) implementation of communication, and (4) program evaluation.

1. Identify Opportunities and Problems

Based on the results of interviews with the Principal, Head of Public Relations, Head of the Accounting and Finance Expertise Program (AKL), and Head of the Light Vehicle Engineering Expertise Program (TKR), all informants stated that the school has experienced significant development in recent years.

These developments are shown by the increase in the school's accreditation status from category B to A, improvements in facilities and infrastructure, and improvements in the school's security system. The informant also said that the existence of three security officers who worked alternately for 24 hours provided a sense of security for school residents.

In addition, all informants emphasized that the Industrial Work Practice (Prakerin) program is a program that cannot be separated from vocational education. Although there is an assumption by some people that Prakerin is a troublesome activity, the school views the program as an advantage that can improve student competence as well as an attraction for prospective students.

The observation findings also show that the school uses alumni as a medium to disseminate information about the development of the school and its various excellent programs.

2. Public Relations Program Planning

The research data shows that the planning of public relations strategies is carried out collaboratively by involving the principal, vice principal, management team, head of the expertise program, teachers, and students.

All informants stated that the school developed an institutional identity through the branding of "SMK Kencana Kemilau," which is an acronym for Creative, Educative, Independent, Innovative, Loyal, Trustworthy, and Excellent.

The results of the interviews show that one of the flagship programs designed to strengthen the school's image is the "Graduate Direct Entrepreneurship" program. This program is supported through Creative and Entrepreneurial Products (PKWU) activities that produce various student products, including packaged palm sugar products that are marketed to the public.

In addition, the school actively collaborates with the business world and the industrial world (DUDI) through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support the implementation of industry-based learning.

3. Implementation of Communication Strategy

The findings of the study show that the implementation of the public relations strategy is carried out through a combination of direct communication and digital communication.

In direct communication, the school carried out socialization activities to schools at the junior high school/MTs level, distributed brochures for new student admissions (PPDB), and used alumni as school promotion agents. Meanwhile, digital communication is carried out through various social media platforms and online media, which include:

- School Website
- Facebook
- Instagram
- TikTok
- WhatsApp

All informants stated that publication is carried out on an ongoing basis whenever there are school activities that are considered worthy of publication.

In addition to information publication, the school also implements the 5S (*Smile, Greeting, Greeting, Polite, Courteous*) and 5R (*Concise, Neat, Resik, Careful, Diligent*) work culture as part of efforts to build a positive image of the institution in the eyes of the community.

4. Public Relations Program Evaluation

The results of the study show that program evaluations are carried out periodically by assessing the achievement of the public relations work program and its impact on the image of the school.

All informants stated that most of the public relations programs have run as planned. The programs that were considered successful in implementation include:

- 1) Industrial Work Practices (Prakerin)
- 2) Competency Test (UKK)
- 3) Industry Visits
- 4) Guest Teacher

5) *Market Day*

6) Industrial cooperation (MoU)

However, there is one program that has not run optimally, namely the Special Job Exchange (BKK). This is due to the lack of graduates who meet the criteria of partner companies for the job placement process.

The informant also revealed several obstacles in the implementation of the program, including time constraints because some activities are carried out at the same time as the learning process, as well as the need to divide tasks between academic activities and public relations activities.

Public Relations Programs Most Interested in Prospective New Students

The results of the study show that of the various public relations programs owned by the school, Industrial Work Practice (Prakerin) is the program that attracts the most attention from prospective new students.

All informants stated that Prakerin is seen as a superior program because it provides opportunities for students to gain direct work experience in the business world and the industrial world.

In addition to providing work experience, the program also allows students to obtain a certificate of competency or a certificate of appreciation from the company where they practice. According to the informant, the existence of the certificate is an added value for graduates when entering the world of work.

These findings show that people's orientation towards vocational education is still strongly influenced by job opportunities and industry experience that can be obtained during the education process.

Opportunities and Challenges of Public Relations Strategies in Increasing the Interest of Prospective New Students

1. Opportunities

Based on the results of the interviews, there are several opportunities that support the success of the school's public relations strategy.

First, the location of the school is on the side of the main road, so that it is easily accessible and recognized by the community. Second, the school has a large enough land for the development of educational facilities in the future. Third, the school's A accreditation status is a supporting factor in building public trust.

In addition, the informant stated that all educators have taught in accordance with their respective fields of expertise and educational backgrounds, so that it is an added value in improving the quality of educational services.

2. Challenge

On the other hand, the research also found several challenges faced by schools in attracting the interest of new prospective students.

The main challenge is the increasing competition from new schools located relatively close to the school area. This condition causes prospective students to have more choices of educational institutions.

The next challenge is the low understanding of some people about the importance of vocational secondary education. According to the informant, there are parents who prefer their children to work immediately after graduating from junior high school rather than continuing their education.

In addition, the limitation of facilities and infrastructure is also a challenge that needs attention. Some informants mentioned that there are still school areas that have not been covered by fences as a whole, so it has the potential to affect the safety and supervision of students.

Summary of Research Findings

Overall, the results of the study show that the public relations strategy of SMK Negeri 1 Gunungkencana is implemented through opportunity identification, program planning, communication implementation, and program evaluation. The strategy is supported by the use of digital media, direct socialization, entrepreneurship programs, and cooperation with the business world and the industrial world. The Prakerin program was found to be the program that attracts the most interest from prospective new students, while the main opportunities come from the school's strategic location and accreditation status A. The challenges faced include competition between schools, limited public understanding of vocational education, and the need for the development of school infrastructure.

DISCUSSION

Public Relations Strategy in Increasing the Interest of New Prospective Students

This study shows that the public relations strategy of SMK Negeri 1 Gunungkencana is carried out through four main stages, namely identification of opportunities and problems, program planning, communication implementation, and program evaluation. These findings show that school public relations practices have adopted a systematic managerial approach in building relationships with the internal and external public.

At the stage of identifying opportunities and problems, schools try to understand internal and external conditions that affect the image of the institution. Improving the status of school accreditation, improving facilities and infrastructure, and strengthening the security system are factors that support the formation of a positive image of the school in the eyes of the public. These findings indicate that the quality of educational services is an important element in building public trust in educational institutions.

The results of the study also show that public relations not only plays a role as a conveyor of information, but also as a manager of public perception. This can be seen from the school's efforts to change the views of some people who consider the Industrial Work Practice (Prakerin) program as an additional burden for students.

Instead, the school positions the program as a competitive advantage that provides real work experience and increases the job readiness of graduates.

In the planning stage, the school develops institutional branding through the concept of "SMK Kencana Kemilau," which represents creative, educational, independent, innovative, loyal, trustworthy, and superior values. These findings show that school branding is not only used as a promotional tool but also as an organizational identity that distinguishes the school from other educational institutions. The existence of clear branding allows schools to build a stronger positioning amid competition between vocational high schools.

In addition, the "Direct Entrepreneurship Graduation" program is an important part of the school's public relations strategy. The program shows that the school is not only oriented to the job placement of graduates, but also to the development of an entrepreneurial spirit. This approach is in line with the demands of vocational education, which emphasizes the ability of students to adapt to changes in the job market and create business opportunities independently.

At the implementation stage, the results of the study showed that schools utilized a combination of direct communication and digital communication. Socialization to junior high school/MTs schools, distribution of brochures, and the use of alumni as promotional agents are forms of direct communication aimed at building closeness with prospective students. Meanwhile, the use of social media such as *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *TikTok*, and school websites shows adaptation to the development of communication technology.

The use of digital media provides an opportunity for schools to reach a wider audience at a relatively cost-efficient rate. The school's presence on various digital platforms also allows for faster and more interactive dissemination of information. Thus, the communication strategy applied not only serves as a means of promotion but also as a medium to build *engagement* with the community.

Other findings showed that schools implemented the 5S (Smile, Greeting, Polite, and Courteous) and 5R (Concise, Neat, Clean, Careful, and Diligent) work cultures as part of the strategy to build a positive image. The organizational culture is a real representation of the quality of school services that can be felt directly by the community. In the context of public relations, the positive experiences that the public gains from interactions with schools contribute to the formation of the institution's reputation in the long run.

At the evaluation stage, the school periodically assesses the success of the public relations programs that have been implemented. The results of the study show that most of the programs are running according to the targets that have been set, although there are still some programs that are not optimal, such as the Special Job Exchange (BKK). This condition shows that evaluation is an important instrument to identify program weaknesses as well as determine the necessary improvement strategies.

Industrial Work Practices as the Most Interesting Public Relations Program

One of the important findings of this study is that Industrial Work Practice (Prakerin) is the program that attracts the most attention from prospective new students. This program is perceived as a tangible form of the school's relationship with the business world and the industrial world that provides direct benefits to students.

The findings suggest that people tend to consider job prospects when choosing vocational schools. The existence of the Prakerin program gives confidence that students not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also practical experience relevant to the needs of the industry. Thus, Prakerin functions as a means of learning as well as a school marketing instrument.

In addition to providing work experience, this program also produces various additional benefits, such as improving work skills, strengthening professional competencies, and opportunities to obtain certificates or recommendations from the company where you practice. The certificate is an added value that can increase the competitiveness of graduates in the job market.

These findings indicate that the success of school public relations is not only determined by promotional activities but also by the quality of the programs offered to students. The greater the benefits felt by students and alumni, the stronger the positive image formed in society.

Opportunities and Challenges of School Public Relations Strategy

The results of the study show that the success of the public relations strategy is influenced by various supporting and inhibiting factors that come from the internal and external environment of the school.

In terms of opportunities, the strategic location of the school is one of the factors that supports the visibility of the institution in the community. In addition, the A accreditation status gives legitimacy to the quality of educational services provided by the school. The availability of educators who are in accordance with their fields of expertise also strengthens public trust in the quality of the learning process.

These findings suggest that internal factors of the school have an important contribution to building an organization's reputation. A positive reputation will make it easier for public relations to carry out various communication and promotional programs because the public already has a relatively high level of trust in the institution.

On the other hand, this study also found a number of challenges faced by schools. Competition with new schools is a major challenge as more and more alternative educational options are available to the community. This condition requires schools to continue to innovate and improve the quality of services in order to remain competitive.

The next challenge is the low understanding of some people about the importance of vocational education. The perception that education after junior high school is not very important can influence parents' decisions in continuing their

children's education. Therefore, socialization and education activities for the community are an important part of the public relations strategy that needs to be carried out sustainably.

In addition to external factors, the limitations of certain facilities and infrastructure are also a challenge for schools. Although in general school facilities have been improved, some physical aspects still need further development to support the comfort and safety of the learning environment.

Implications of Research Findings

The findings of this study show that an effective public relations strategy in the context of vocational education does not only focus on promotional activities, but also on building reputation through improving service quality, strengthening relationships with the industrial world, and optimal use of digital media.

The success of SMK Negeri 1 Gunungkencana in building an image through superior programs, especially Prakerin and entrepreneurship programs, shows that vocational schools need to highlight real benefits that can be felt by students and the community. Thus, the public relations strategy not only functions as an organizational communication tool but also as a strategic instrument in increasing the competitiveness of educational institutions and attracting the interest of prospective new students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the public relations strategy (PR) at SMKN 1 Gunungkencana has an important role in increasing the interest of prospective new students. The public relations strategy is implemented systematically through four main stages, namely identification of opportunities and problems, program planning, communication implementation, and program evaluation. The implementation of the strategy is supported by strengthening the school's image through branding "SMK Kencana Kemilau", socialization to junior high schools/MTs, the use of social media and websites, the development of entrepreneurship programs, and cooperation with the business and industrial world (DUDI).

The results of the study show that the Industrial Work Practice (Prakerin) program is the flagship program that attracts the most interest from prospective new students because it provides real work experience, competency improvement, and opportunities to obtain certificates from partner companies. The program has succeeded in building public trust in the quality of vocational education organized by schools.

This study also found that the success of the public relations strategy is supported by several factors, such as the strategic location of the school, the accreditation status of A, the quality of adequate human resources, and the existence of partnerships with the industrial world. However, schools still face several challenges, including competition with other educational institutions, low

understanding of the importance of vocational education by some people, and limited facilities and infrastructure.

Thus, a planned, innovative, and community-oriented public relations strategy has proven to be able to build a positive image of the school and increase the interest of prospective new students. Therefore, SMKN 1 Gunungkencana needs to continue to strengthen superior programs, optimize the use of digital media, and increase cooperation with various stakeholders so that the competitiveness and trust of the public in the school increase.

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