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Evaluating Dialogic Communication of Pesantren in East Java, Indonesia: Building Public Relationships via Instagram

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Abstract: Instagram posts by pesantren are very high but replies and reactions to followers' comments are still very low, as an indicator that communication between pesantren and their public is not a two-way dialogue. This study aims to evaluate dialogic communication of pesantren in East Java, Indonesia in building public relationships via Instagram. A quantitative approach with content analysis methods is used to measure dialogic communication of pesantren on Instagram with four principles, namely the information of interest to public, the generation of return visits, the conservation of visitors and the dialogic loop. The sample was determined using purposive sampling by identifying and verifying official Instagram accounts of pesantren that had a minimum of 15 posts on June and 15 posts on July 2023. Data analysis used frequency distribution to examine the frequency of posts. Results indicated that most of pesantren have implemented dialogic communications in building public relationships on Instagram optimally. The principle of information of interest to publics and the principle of generation of return visits are most commonly used with a very high category. The principle of conservation of visitors is low category and the principle of dialogic loop is very low category implemented. The implication of this study can provide the theoretical contribution and strategic implication on implementation the dialogic communication to build public relationships through Instagram. With a lack of study done in this area, the novelty of this study is in extending understanding on the use of dialogic communication of pesantren, especially in East Java, in building public relationships on Instagram.

Keywords: Dialogic Communication; Public Relationships; Instagram; Pesantren; Indonesia

Introduction

The emergence of social media platforms has revolutionized how people communicate. The role of social media is an important component as a digital communication medium between individuals in interacting (Ismail & Abdullah, 2023). Social media is the main medium for the public to obtain information (Kriyantono et al., 2023), as an effective medium in conveying public information (Uran et al., 2022), and promotional strategies for organizations (Mahamad et al., 2024). Social media has changed the way organizations work in communication and conveying public information. Social media presents innovations as the biggest revolution in the history of communication development and has an impact on communication practices in the world of public relations (Kent & Li, 2020), so that public relations are required to develop knowledge and skills to be able to adapt to advances in digital technology (Sutherland et al., 2020).

Social media has an important role in providing real-time communication services and running a dialogue between organizations and the wider public on a constant basis (Gesualdi, 2019; Monacho et al., 2023). The increasing use of social media provides opportunities for organizations to connect with publics that cannot be accessed conventionally through traditional means of communication media (Men & Tsai, 2016). The social media provides opportunities for organizations to communicate more effectively to achieve common meaning through reciprocal conversations with the public in an effort to maintain long-term, mutually beneficial dialogic relationships (Wang & Yang, 2020).

Social media can be implemented by organizations to encourage public participation through the dissemination of information and interactive dialogic communication like Instagram. This kind of social media platform provides space for organizations and the public to interact directly and dialogically through comments, responses, reactions and likes (Mustafa et al., 2022). The use of social media by organizations with effective management can increase public engagement (Atnan et al., 2024).

This study aims to evaluate dialogic communication of pesantren in East Java, Indonesia in creating good relationships with the public on Instagram, examining in more depth the implementation of each dialogic communication principle whether it is implemented optimally to build public relationships. This study takes as its object the official Instagram account of pesantren based on the results of researchers' observations which show that Instagram is one of the social media platforms most widely used by pesantren in Indonesia, and the 5 largest pesantren in Indonesia are in East Java Province (Harahap, 2022) with the highest followers of Instagram of pesantren in Indonesia (Pradana & Luthfi, 2024). Observational data shows that Instagram posts of pesantren such as reels, feeds and stories are very high but replies and reactions to followers' comments are still very low as an indicator that communication of pesantren and their public are not running in a dialogue.

Evaluating the implementation of the principles of dialogical communication through official Instagram accounts of pesantren is important to find out how pesantren in Indonesia, especially in East Java, build two-way communication in a dialogical manner with students, teachers and employees as internal publics, as well as with students' guardians, alumni and the community as external publics. This study will contribute of dialogical communication theory through empirical evidence applied by pesantren through the use of Instagram as a communication medium in building organization-public relationships.

Literature Review

1. Instagram Social Media Roles for Public Relations of Pesantren

Social media is an interactive communication channel by providing space for its users for two-way interaction and feedback (Kent & Li, 2020). Social media provides a great opportunity for public relations to create more interactive and dialogical communication with the public to construct build mutually understanding, mutually supportive, and mutually beneficial relationships. Social media has an important role for organizations in reaching and accommodating wider public needs in the field of information and communication, as well as as a strategy in increasing public participation through dialogic communication activities (Prayatya et al., 2024).

Instagram as a social media platform makes it easy for people to access information (Amrullah et al., 2024), also as an effective medium for pesantren in conveying information to the public (Luthfi & Mubarak, 2023; Pradana & Luthfi, 2024). Instagram as a leading social network provides opportunities for public relations of pesantren to convey information and build two-way communication with the public (Al-Kandari et al., 2019; Rejeb et al., 2022). Instagram makes it easier and friendlier to use, and offers more interesting content than other social media platforms (Monacho et al., 2023). What is unique about Instagram is not only the aspect of posting content in the form of video reels and photo feeds, but also the space for organizations and the public to communicate interactively through comments, likes, shares, comments and mentions (Hussin & Ahmad, 2024).

In the context of pesantren and its practice of public relations, Instagram as a social media platform can be used more optimally to build two-way communication in a dialogue with the public in order to create positive, harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships. Instagram social media is a social media platform that provides real-time information and communication services for pesantren to establish relationships with their public. Dialogue is a public relations concept in achieving an effective two-way relationship between

organizations and the public (Kent & Lane, 2021). In this context, two-way relationships between pesantren and their public can build with implementing dialogic communication via Instagram.

2. The Principles of Dialogic Communication on Instagram

Dialogic theory explains that communication is carried out to build relationships, not just convey messages for the public to read or communicate with the public with the aim of persuasion. However, dialogue aims to build mutual understanding and collaboration between organizations and the public regarding common interests (Kent & Lane, 2017). Dialogic communication is the most ethical and effective form of communication in public relations practice and social media comes with various platforms to facilitate organizations in building dialogical relationships with their publics (Wang & Yang, 2020). Dialogic communication is a model in public relations practice to build collaboration, build trust and create mutually beneficial relationships for the organization and the public (Kent & Lane, 2021; Kent & Li, 2020).

Dialogic communication is one way for organizations to build relationships with the public and Instagram social media has great potential as a dialogic communication medium that can be utilized by organizations in building and maintaining good relationships with their public (Wang & Yang, 2020). Kent and Taylor proposed five principles as guidelines in achieving successful the organizational dialogic communication and public on World Wide Web, namely usefulness of information, generation of return visits, ease of the interface, conservation of visitors and dialogic loop (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Various study approaches using dialogic communication principles in the context of social media have been widely applied, such as those carried out in the context of Twitter (Wang & Yang, 2020), Facebook (Liu et al., 2020; Men et al., 2018), WeChat (Tsai & Men, 2018), Weibo (Chen et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2021), Website (Veronika et al., 2023). There has been no previous study on the implementation of dialogic communication in the context of Instagram pesantren, especially in East Java, Indonesia. Several previous studies only focused on the use of social media in cyber public relations of pesantren (Saputra & Luthfi, 2023), uses of social media as a medium for da'wah of pesantren (Munawara et al., 2020), and study of the effectiveness of Instagram as a medium for information of pesantren (Luthfi & Mubarak, 2023; Pradana & Luthfi, 2024). The implementation of dialogic communication through Instagram facilitates the building of public involvement which has a positive impact on building public relationships.

In this study, the principle of "ease of the interface" is eliminated as standard on all social media especially Instagram pages, and adopting the principle "information of interest to publics" produced by Men et al as a modification of the principle of "usefulness of information" (Men et al., 2018) in accordance with the characteristics of Instagram to measure dialogic communication of pesantren in building public relationship. There are four principles for measuring dialogic communication activities of pesantren, namely are the information of interest to publics (measured through the consistency of posting feed content, reels, stories, captions, profiles), the generation of return visits (efforts to get the public to revisit pesantren' Instagram accounts measured through posting feeds, reels, stories that are updated regularly and consistently by using hashtags in each post), the conservation of visitors (an effort to maintain and preserve good relations with the public by providing links to other media accounts such as the official pesantren Website account, Facebook, You Tube, Twitter, WhatsApp), the dialogic loop (measured through mentions and responses and reactions to public comments). Four principles of dialogic communication are relevant as an approach for pesantren in building relationships with the public through the social media Instagram page. So, five problem formulations are proposed for this study as follows:

RQ1 : How do pesantren employ information of interest to publics principle on Instagram?

RQ2 : How do pesantren employ generation of return visits principle on Instagram?

RQ3 : How do pesantren employ conservation of visitors principle on their Instagram?

RQ4 : How do pesantren employ dialogic loop principle on their Instagram?

RQ5 : How do pesantren implement dialogic communication optimally on Instagram?

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with content analysis methods to evaluate dialogic communication of pesantren in East Java, Indonesia to build public relationships via Instagram. Instagram was chosen as the data collection platform because it is the social media platform most widely used by pesantren in East Java, Indonesia and provides various interesting posting spaces such as feeds, reels, stories and provides comments, likes, shares and reactions column services for each post.

2. Data Collection

Researchers took official Instagram accounts active by pesantren in East Java, Indonesia as the main sample for data analysis. The active Instagram account category is an account that is always active and has a minimum of 20 posts every month (Huang et al., 2021). In this research, the active category of pesantren's Instagram official accounts is those have a minimum of 15 posts per month. All pesantren's Instagram posts from June to July 2023 as a unit of analysis consist of: (a) pesantren's Instagram page (b) feeds (c) reels (d) story which is posted every day. Based on observations, researchers obtained 40 official Instagram accounts of pesantren in East Java in the active category, then verified the posts and fulfilled the requirements as research samples.

Even though researchers only observed and found 0.59% ($n = 40$) of official Instagram accounts from 6,745 pesantren in East Java, Indonesia, which is in the active category with a minimum of 15 posts as a limitation of the sampling method in this study, and this sample is representative because 15% ($n = 6$) of the sample came from 5 Cities (55%) as a representation of 9 Cities, and 85% ($n = 34$) of the sample came from 20 Regency (67%) as a representation of 29 Regency in East Java, Indonesia. This sample has exceeded 33% above the minimum sample (30) for a quantitative approach (Sugiono & Lestari, 2021).

3. Measures

Measuring the implementation of dialogic communication principles on pesantren's Instagram official accounts refers to the dialogic communication theory by Kent & Talyor (Kent & Taylor, 1998) and several previous studies which were modified in accordance with the research context regarding dialogic communication of pesantren in building public relationships through Instagram. This study adopts four measurement indicators from five principles of dialogic communication proposed by Kent & Taylor; the generation of return visits, the conservation of visitors, the dialogic loop and one principle "the usefulness of information" modified to become "information of interest to publics" adopted from previous study (Men et al., 2018) by eliminating the principle of "ease of the interface" as standard on all Instagram social media pages.

Furthermore, these four principles are operationalized as follows (a) information of interest to publics was measured through the following components as information of interest to the public referring to the operational theory of previous study; feeds, reels, caption on the post, pesantren's vision/ mission/ goals, logo of pesantren, call centre (b) generation of return visits was measured through the components are a strategy for getting the public to return to the pesantren's Instagram page; regularly feeds updated, regularly reels updated, regularly story updated, use of hashtags on the feeds, use of hashtags on the reels (c) conservation of visitors was measured through the following components as an effort to maintain and preserve visitors so they continue to follow the pesantren's Instagram page: link to the pesantren's Website, link to the pesantren's Facebook, link to the pesantren's YouTube, link to the pesantren's Website WhatsApp (d) dialogic loop was measured through the following components to determine the reciprocal communication between pesantren and the public by the Instagram page: reply by the pesantren to a public's comment on feeds, reply by the pesantren to a public's comment on reels, reaction by the pesantren's Instagram admin to a public's comment on feeds, reaction by the pesantren's Instagram admin to a public's comment on feeds, mention by the pesantren to public's Instagram account.

4. Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study uses a frequency distribution formula to measure the level of implementation of dialogic communication principles on the pesantren’s official Instagram account, as well as evaluate how each pesantren implements the 4 principles of dialogic communication through their official Instagram account with the following frequency distribution formula (Bungin, 2018).

$$N = \frac{fx}{N} \times 100\%$$

After knowing the percentage frequency distribution of each indicator, the researcher calculated the mean score for each Islamic boarding school Instagram post and the mean score for the application of dialogical communication principles from all Islamic boarding school Instagram accounts using the following mean formula (Kriyantono, 2020).

$$M = \frac{\sum fx}{N} \times 100\%$$

Findings

1. Evaluating Dialogic Communication of Pesantren on Instagram

Evaluation through analysis of the implementation dialogic communication on 40 pesantren’s official Instagram accounts as samples as shown in the following table. Based on the frequency distribution analysis shows that most of pesantren have implemented dialogic communications in building public relationships on Instagram optimally (52.5%) with the highest percentage being 95% and the lowest 30%. As many as 5% ($n = 2$) pesantren have implemented dialogic communication in the very optimal category, 47.5% ($n = 19$) pesantren have implemented in the optimal category and 47.5% ($n = 19$) pesantren have implemented in the low category.

Based on the number of posts on pesantren’s Instagram accounts from the results of researchers’ observations on September 2024, it shows that 50% ($n = 1$) form pesantren in the category very optimal in implementing dialogic communication are in the 0 – 1k posts range, and 50% ($n = 1$) are in the 1k – 2k posts range. Pesantren in the optimal category are in the 0-1k posts range as many as 42% ($n = 8$), are in the 1k-2k posts range as many as 42% ($n = 8$) and are in the 2k-3k posts range as many as 16% ($n = 3$). Meanwhile, in the low category in the implementation of dialogic communication, 42% ($n = 8$) are in the 0-1k range, 53% ($n = 10$) are in the 1k-2k range and 5% ($n = 1$) are in the 2k-3k range posts.

Table 1. Descriptive information of 40 pesantren’s official Instagram account

No.	Official Instagram Account	Followers	Frequency	Percentage
1	darussalam.blokagung	11.072	13	65 %
2	alishlahbws_official	3.087	12	60 %
3	pesantrennuris_jember	11.616	10	50 %
4	pesantrennuruljadid	54.105	9	45 %
5	al_mashduqiah_official	3.217	10	50 %
6	riyash.media	7.563	13	65 %
7	s1dogiri	73.601	10	50 %
8	assunniyahofficial	16.680	14	70 %
9	ponpes.dalwa	128.482	13	65 %
10	aptalyasini	19.065	8	40 %
11	alfithrahsby	36.513	9	45 %
12	tebuireng.online	68.486	11	55 %
13	pphamalatulquran.official	11.376	6	30 %
14	ponpes.elkisi	6.494	11	55 %
15	mbi.amanatulummah.pacet	18.839	10	50 %
16	ypp.nurulislam	7.874	13	65 %
17	alfalah plos0	214.235	9	45 %

18	pondoklirboyo	586.627	9	45 %
19	pondok_modern_darul_hikmah	4.864	8	40 %
20	pondok.modern.gontor	252.450	11	55 %
21	ngabarexcellent	17.464	7	35 %
22	darulhudamayak	25.568	8	40 %
23	pmarrisalah	6.435	8	38 %
24	alislam_joresan	7.253	18	90 %
25	alfattah_kikil	5.423	14	70 %
26	tremas_1820	31.749	15	75 %
27	santri_almardliyyah	3.631	12	60 %
28	pondokgading.id	18.047	7	35 %
29	pondokmodernalbarokah	2.335	11	55 %
30	menaralangitan	92.161	10	50 %
31	pptanggir.tuban	5.901	11	55 %
32	alrosyidgraphy	10.197	14	70 %
33	nurulcholilonline	17.104	12	60 %
34	alittihadislami	1.333	8	40 %
35	banyuanyar	16.282	9	45 %
36	batabata.official	17.327	9	45 %
37	thursinaibis	40.201	11	55 %
38	arohmahputriibis	47.817	19	95 %
39	daarul_ukhuwwah_malang	5.430	11	55 %
40	mahad_alizzah_batu	13.199	13	65 %

Source: Processed by researchers (2024)

2. Implementation Principles of Dialogic Communication on Pesantren’s Instagram Page

Data was collected from 2.116 content from 40 pesantren’s official Instagram accounts in East Java, Indonesia with the criteria of having a minimum of 15 posts on June and 15 posts on July 2023 as the unit of analysis. It revealed that the frequency distribution test on the implementation of dialogic communication which is measured through four principles with 20 statement explained in the following table.

The results of frequency distribution analysis to evaluate implementation principles of dialogic communication of pesantren on Instagram page shows the total frequency value on the high category ($f = 446$, 56%). The information of interest to the public is the principle most used by pesantren in building relationships with the public on Instagram ($f = 188$, 78.33%) is in the very high category with as many feeds posts 1.486 ($n = 40$, $M = 37$), with 2.046.932 likes, 7.158 comments and 895 reactions by the public. Post as many reels 630 ($n = 38$, $M = 17$) are shared by the public 72.733 with 1.762.000 likes, 11.119 comments and 579 public reactions. Caption of the post as many 1.240 ($n = 36$, $M = 34$).

Then followed by principle of generation of return visits ($f = 151$, 75.50%) is in the very high category with as many posts of hashtags on the feeds 27.200 ($n = 38$, $M = 72$), posting of hashtags on the reels as many 1.048 ($n = 32$, $M = 33$). The principle of conservation of visitors is a principle that is low category implemented by pesantren in building public relationship on Instagram ($f = 74$, 46.25%) and principle of dialogic loop ($f = 33$, 16.50%) is very low category with as many mentions of public accounts as many 333 ($n = 17$, $M = 20$), reply by the pesantren to a public’s comment on feeds as many 61 ($n = 7$, $M = 9$), reply by the pesantren to a public’s comment on reels as many 177 ($n = 5$, $M = 35$), reaction by the pesantren to a public’s comment on feeds as many 23 ($n = 3$, $M = 8$), reaction by the pesantren to a public’s comment on reels as many 14 ($n = 1$, $M = 14$).

Table 2. Descriptive information of four principles of dialogic communication of pesantren

Variable/ Measure	N	Frequency	Percentage	Assessment
Information of interest to publics		188	78.33%	Very High
Feeds	40	40	100.00%	Very High
Reels	40	38	95.00%	Very High
Caption of the post	40	36	90.00%	Very High
Pesantren’s vision/ mission/ goals	40	24	60.00%	High

Logo of pesantren	40	39	97.50%	Very High
Call centre	40	11	27.50%	Low
Generation of return visits		151	75.50%	Very High
Regularly feed updated	40	34	85.00%	Very High
Regularly reels updated	40	11	27.50%	Low
Regularly story updated	40	36	90.00%	Very High
The use of hashtags on the feeds	40	38	95.00%	Very High
The use of hashtags on the reels	40	32	80.00%	Very High
Conservation of visitors		74	46.25%	Low
Link to the pesantren's Website	40	28	70.00%	High
Link to the pesantren's Facebook	40	12	30.00%	Low
Link to the pesantren's Youtube	40	24	60.00%	High
Link to the pesantren's WhatsApp	40	10	25.00%	Very Low
Dialogic loop		33	16.50%	Very Low
Reply by the pesantren to a public's comment on feeds	40	7	17.50%	Very Low
Reply by the pesantren to a public's comment on reels	40	5	12.50%	Very Low
Reaction by the pesantren to a public's comment on feeds	40	3	7.50%	Very Low
Reaction by the pesantren to a public's comment on reels	40	1	2.50%	Very Low
Mention by the pesantren to public's Instagram account	40	17	42.50%	Low

Source: Processed by researchers (2024)

Discussion

This study expands the dialogic communication theory and practically in the context of social media to study how pesantren apply to engage their public through Instagram. The findings of this study showed that the principle of "information of interest to the public" is the highest principle used through posting images in the form of feeds and video reels on official pesantren Instagram accounts, indicating that pesantren is optimizing the dissemination of information interesting to engage the public through Instagram. This finding strengthens the results of previous research which shows that the use of Instagram with features that are more oriented towards image and video visualization as a medium for persuasion and asymmetric two-way communication (Al-Kandari et al., 2019). Interesting information must be in line with the needs of the public, not based on organizational interests (Veronika et al., 2023). So, a majority of the pesantren's Instagram posts present the daily activities of santri, statements by Kyai as leaders of pesantren as well as motivational messages for dakwah according to public needs.

Pesantren's Instagram feeds and reels posts functions as a form of responsibility and professionalism in providing complete and credible information services to the public. This effort strengthens previous research findings which show that interesting and credible information presented via social media can increase public participation (Prayatya et al., 2024). The findings of this study are also in line with previous research which states that commercial organizations focus more on disseminating interesting information through social media in building public engagement (Wang & Yang, 2020). The principle of "information of interest to the public" is one of the principles that can be maximized in its implementation through social media platforms for pesantren and organizations in a broader context as an effort to increase public participation and trust in building positive relationships.

Efforts to attract the public to return to the pesantren's Instagram are carried out through consistently and periodically updating the feed, even though the reels posts are not running optimally, which is an implementation of the principle of generation of return visits. In line with previous research findings which show that the ease of getting information and keeping it updated is an attraction for the public to visit social media pages (Kriyantono et al., 2023; Mahamad et al., 2024). The use of hashtags on feeds, hashtags on reels,

and captions as has been implemented optimally by pesantren as well as consistent post updates can increase public engagement through comments, like and share. This finding is in line with previous research which revealed that updating information and adding phrases in the context of Instagram such as hashtags and captions can encourage public participation to follow, provide comments and even produce new messages according to the topic being discussed (Liu et al., 2020). This certainly has an impact on the public's interest in revisiting pesantren' Instagram accounts.

The dialogic loop principle as the main function for pesantren in carrying out two-way communication with the public is still not optimal. The pesantren's responses and reactions to public comments are still in the very low category. Instagram as a medium that offers interactivity between users has not been utilized optimally by pesantren through the implementation of the dialogic loop principle. One of the advantages of social media is that there is space for the public to provide feedback through comments or opinions and pesantren have the opportunity to provide feedback to the public's comment. Reply to public comments as proof of the organization's openness in providing two-way communication services, as well as the availability of easy access space for the public so that their participation increases (Huang et al., 2021).

In line with the assumption of dialogic communication theory that it is not enough for organizations to provide organizational information, but what is more important is that the information must meet the needs of the public and this will be achieved if the organization understands through direct interaction with the public through responses to public comments (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The implementation of the dialogic loop through responding to public comments, providing positive reactions and starting conversations through mentions has a significant effect on public engagement through social media (Men et al., 2018).

The findings of this study indicates that communication culture of pesantren is two-way asymmetry based on data that conveying organizational information is prioritized over providing responses to public comments. Even though communication culture of pesantren has not been two-way symmetry, this does not mean it is not dialogic because dialogue is an organization's ability to build ethical, honest, empathetic and credible communication (Kent & Lane, 2021). This is the limitation of this study, only evaluating dialogic communication of pesantren via Instagram using a quantitative approach to content analysis methods. Therefore, more in-depth research using a qualitative approach to explore communication culture of pesantren needs to be carried out in order to find out what the dialogic communication model is that the characteristic of pesantren.

Conclusion

The implementation dialogic communication of pesantren via Instagram is more directed at disseminating interesting information to the public and building strategies so that the public returns to pesantren's Instagram accounts. Meanwhile, the dialogic loop in creating two-way communication with their public is not yet optimal. This study contributes theoretically to the development of dialogic communication theory through digital media, as well as practically in the optimal use of social media for the implementation of dialogic communication in organizations, especially for pesantren in building public relationship through the dissemination interesting information, up-to-date post, regularly updated content and increasing public participation through the comments column by providing quick and positive replies and reactions to public comments. Methodologically, the results of this study can be used as a reference framework by organizations, especially for pesantren in evaluating the quality of dialogic communication carried out to improve the quality of public communication through digital platforms.

The limitation of this research is that it only takes Instagram of pesantren in East Java province, as an object to evaluate the implementation of dialogic communication via Instagram. For future researchers, this study can be used as a comparative reference in a broader context by taking objects on other social media platforms of pesantren and adding other variables or indicators according to the context of future research. The qualitative approach can be adopted to explore in-depth why pesantren underutilize the dialogic loop in building two-way communication with their public in the hope of finding a new model of communication characteristic of pesantren as a development or critique for dialogic communication theory.

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