



## Barriers in Marketing Public Relations and Narrative Paradigm Theory

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### ABSTRACT

Universities are becoming increasingly competitive in attracting prospective students. Various Marketing Public Relations activities that are direct or mediated are carried out to attract the interest of prospective students. This study aims to identify barriers to Marketing PR activities in universities and solutions to overcome these obstacles. This research uses a qualitative case study with a multi-case design. The research object consists of the Public Relations of the Islamic University of Bandung and the Islamic University of Sultan Agung Semarang. The reason for choosing these two universities is that they are members of the Coordinating Board for Private Islamic Universities and are institutionally accredited with Superior. The data collection techniques used in this study were in-depth interviews, observation, discussion, and literature review. The informants in the study consisted of seven (7) people: the head of public relations, public relations staff, and the vice-chancellor in charge of the public relations department. The results of this study are expected to help university public relations to anticipate and overcome obstacles in Marketing PR activities by using the theory of the narrative paradigm. Public relations must have the ability to tell stories using narratives that are based on data from the field and touching on aspects of public emotion.

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## INTRODUCTION

Marketing PR is a synergy between marketing activities and public relations strategy. Harris & T. Whalen (2006) define marketing PR (MPR) as the use of public relations strategies and tactics to achieve marketing objectives. A company without a vision becomes a company without direction. All components in the company should ideally know the vision that needs to be realized (Rosalia et al., 2020). The purpose of MPR is to create awareness, stimulate sales, facilitate communication and build relationships between consumers, companies, and brands. Marketing and public relations are both important disciplines and must complement each other (Estanyol, Elsenda, 2012). MPR is a programme that aims to protect or enhance the image of a brand and build brand sales by encouraging a number of intermediaries (Papasolomou, I., & Melanthiou, Y, 2012).

MPR activities are not only carried out in companies but also in educational institutions. Higher education institutions carry out MPR activities in order to improve the image and reputation of the institution and also to increase the interest of prospective students in studying at the institution. Amiso George (2008) in his research explained that: educational institutions recognise the importance of centralising their communication activities through the university communication office (PR) to ensure that communication activities reflect a positive image of the university. MPR activities integrated in higher education institutions are an activity that creates a positive impression for stakeholders. The MPR in higher education has the potential to become a steering tool in integrated marketing communications because the ability of public relations (PR) in general contributes to achievement of marketing objectives.

The activities of MPR were inseparable from obstacles, namely internal and external obstacles. This barrier can

prevent PR from performing its functions and roles in the organisation (Cardwell, L. A., Williams, S., & Pyle, A. 2017). Barriers to communication activities in higher education consist of three classifications, namely external, internal, and interpersonal relationships (Lašáková, A., Bajžíková, Ľ., & Dedze, I. 2017). Research in Latvia explained that the one of the obstacles to the activities of MPR was the lack of understanding of concept of PR Marketing (Dmitrijeva, K., & Batraga, A. 2012). According to Julia T. Wood (2012), there are two general types of barriers : external and internal. Anne Gregory (2004: 81) argues that public relations barriers can arise from internal and external factors. In the new global community, advertising messages can be delivered through new media, particularly the internet (Dewi & Sugandi, 2019).

People in the organisation are always ready to communicate with stakeholders (Mahendra et al., 2018). In the context of MPR, the barriers to MPR activities consist of barriers that come from the internal public of the institution and the external public of the institution. In the context of this research, the internal obstacles and the external obstacles to MPR activities are discussed and analysed. The results of the study reveal that the dynamics of internal relations can hinder public relations practitioners from carrying out the role of public relations. How corporate public relations practitioners build relationships with the external public, to gauge practitioners' orientation towards dialogue, and to identify challenges in building external relations. The research of Cardwell, L. A., Williams, S., & Pyle, A (2017) shows that internal relationship management is a prerequisite for the success of corporate PR practitioners in developing mutually beneficial relationships with key publics. An exploratory study conducted by Azman, et.al., (2019) in Malaysia explains that there are several barriers in the



promotion of the University-Industry Collaboration (UIC), namely cultural differences, lack of expertise, inadequate policies and institutional regulations, lack of trust, and lack of appreciation.

Promotion activities in tertiary institutions are very complex, so there must be a consistent standard and be able to communicate academic standard scores that show evidence of academic achievement from higher education. Determining the best promotion strategy can help to minimise time and costs that are targeted (Mustakim et al., 2022).

In an effort to overcome obstacles in the MPR activities that are internal and external, researchers provide solutions to overcome these obstacles by using Fisher's Narrative Paradigm Theory in an effort to provide interesting and argumentative explanations to the public. Narrative Paradigm Theory has been proposed to help explain how storytelling influences changes in public attitudes and behaviour (Lee, H., Fawcett, J., & DeMarco, R. 2016). The paradigm argues that narrative provides an enforceable continuity that binds the past, present, and future to guide culturally coordinated discourse and action (Heath, R. L., & Waymer, D. 2019). Crisis response narrative theory (Heath, 2004) argues that ethical narrative is effective because it increases trust, attitudes towards the spokesperson, and identification with the spokesperson. Normative crisis communication theory emphasises the correct disclosure of information rather than the circulation of information (Clementson, D. E. 2020). There are still few studies that examine the barriers to public relations marketing, especially in the higher education context. Therefore, this study aims to explore the barriers to public relations marketing activities in universities.

## METHODOLOGY

This case study research aims to analyse problems related to the barriers of PR

Marketing in Islamic Private Universities in Bandung and Semarang, Indonesia. The researcher chose the two universities because they both have superior accreditation (A) and both are leading Islamic private universities in Indonesia. The two universities have similarities in history and institutions. The multi-case design allows the researcher to explore differences in the object or research setting. The researchers compared the barriers to PR marketing activities in the two universities and examined them based on the narrative paradigm theory. Data collection and data collection were carried out for approximately 20 months from March 2016 to November 2018. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews with informants and field observations. In-depth interviews were conducted three times with the head of public relations, once with the vice-chancellor and twice with public relations staff. The interviews usually last about 1 hour. In addition, the researchers also have the experience of having been the head of Public Relations at PTS about three years, so they have an idea in the field of how PR marketing activities work in universities.

The informants or resource persons in this study consisted of 7 people. The sampling technique uses a purposive technique, where the researcher selects informants according to their needs in relation to the required data.

Table 1. Research Informants

Informant	Age	Education	Level	Experience (year)
1	40	Master	Head of PR	5
2	42	Master	Head of MPR	4
3	43	Master	PR Staff	12
4	45	Master	Marketing	10
5	58	Doctor	Vice Rector	3
6	48	Doktor	Vice Rector	3
7	48	Doctor	Vice Rector	4

Source: Author Processing (2023)



In order to inform the informants, the researchers made preliminary observations to study MPR activities in the two private universities. The informants in this study are officers who work on and are responsible for PR marketing activities. The educational background of the head and staff of PR is in public relations, while the educational background of the head of MPR is in management. Studies show that the PR professionals with more and more educational backgrounds in public relations have superior knowledge, skills, and expertise in handling PR tasks (Tsetsura, K. 2010). The Vice chancellor was elected as an informant because structurally the public relations department is under the responsibility of the vice chancellor and all planning and activities of PR Marketing must be approved by the vice chancellor. All informants in this study had been given permission to be interviewed by the researcher. The selected informants already have experience in PR marketing activities, including the head of PR who has been working on PR marketing activities for more than 4 years, as well as public relations and marketing staff who have been carrying out their activities for more than 10 years, so they are considered experienced in PR marketing in higher education.

In-depth interviews were conducted on the barriers to implementing PR marketing activities and how to overcome them. The interviews were structured according to the research question, but what happened in the field was that the questions evolved according to the answers given by the informants. The interviews are flexible with the arrangement of questions and wording that can be changed at the time of the interview, adjusted to the needs and conditions when they occur, including the socio-cultural characteristics of the resource persons. Data collection was carried out for approximately 12 months from March 2016 to February 2017. Data collection

techniques included in-depth interviews and field observations. In-depth interviews were conducted three times with the head of public relations, once with the vice-chancellor, and twice with public relations staff. The interviews usually last about 1 hour. In addition, the researcher also has the experience of having been a head of public relations in higher education for approximately three years, so that they have an overview in the field of how MPR activities are carried out in the university.

The researchers conducted a data study through interviews with informants, direct observation, and participant observation of marketing activities at the two universities. In this stage the researcher classified the data from observations and interviews with sources based on research questions. The data was reduced and classified, then the interview data that were considered irrelevant to the research were discarded. The researchers verified the data during the study with the intention of testing its reliability and validity. The conclusion is obtained after the researcher finds the research results which are then analysed and concluded according to the research objectives.

Qualitative validation is an effort to check the accuracy of research findings, as well described by researchers and participants (Creswell, 2016). The researcher documents the case study procedures and documents as many steps in the procedure as possible. To ensure internal validity, researchers provided data triangulation and method triangulation. In data triangulation, the authors collected data from 7 informants in the form of interviews, observations, and documentation which were then analysed in full. In interviews, formal and informal questions and answers related to the results of the researcher's interpretation of reality and the meaning conveyed by the informants will ensure the correct value of the data. Researchers tried to find evidence from selected informants



purposely through recorded interviews and then transcribed them. Meanwhile, in method triangulation, the researcher checks the level of trust in the research findings through several data collection techniques. Researchers triangulated the method through in-depth interviews with seven informants, direct observation of MPR activities, participant observation of MPR, literature study, and documentation of MPR media. Researchers began to make direct observations and research on MPR activities in the university within the last five years.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The barriers to MPR that occur in universities are dominated by internal public barriers. Most of the internal community does not understand the concept of the MPR. In addition, there are differences in perception between leadership and Public Relations regarding the implementation of MPR activities. The following is a table regarding the obstacles experienced by PR marketing at Universitas Islam Bandung (UNISBA) and Universitas Islam Sultan Agung (UNISSULA)

Table 2. Barriers to Marketing PR at Unisba and Unissula

No.	Unisba	Unissula
1.	Internal public misunderstanding	Differences in perception with the leadership
2.	Lack of human resources in PR	Lack of personal in PR and Marketing
3.	The budget is not following the planning	The budget is not following the proposal submission
4.	University policies regarding new student admission are often delayed	Lack of training to improve the knowledge and skills of PR staff

*Source: Author processing (2018)*

The study in Kuwait explained that some obstacles in MPR activities were due to the lack of management understanding of the concept of public relations and the public relations

profession which was less involved in a dominant coalition (Bashir, M. 2019). One of the obstacles to public relations in an institution is due to the limitations and ignorance of the public in understanding a phenomenon (Varey, R. J. 1996) (Peyronel, A. C, 2000) since the internal public often has negative prejudices against MPR activities. In fact, the task of PR is to provide an explanation and understanding of the concept and implementation of MPR based on the PR Transfer Process.

**Hostility.** Public relations needs to know whether or not there is an attitude of hostility aimed at the institution or PR, how bad it is, what it looks like, what the factors that cause it, and how to reduce the hostility. Public relations usually get information from internal social media, where the internal public does not agree with MPR activities outside the city because they think that the activity is just traveling. Social media has a role in providing information from the public to PR, including for MPR activities. (Constantinides, E., & Zinck Stagno, M. C, 2011). Public relations in the university must be able to explain and convince the internal public that MPR activities did not go for traveling but making presentations in front of high school students within a limited periode and what limited personnel. The success of public relations is not only when they are conveying information, but also facilitating and resolving conflicts between institutions and the public (Brunner, B. R. 2009).

**Prejudice.** Prejudice can arise from personal, educational, social conflicts or clashes between parts, environmental influences, or simply because of misunderstanding. Often there are differences in perceptions between the leader and the PR department in the implementation of MPR. Studies in the United Kingdom explain that there are



often misunderstandings and prejudices in promotional activities in higher education (Benjamin, T. B. 1993), where leaders whose educational background is not from Public Relations often do not understand the function and role of PR in institutions. This collision is an obstacle in MPR activities. When there is a conflict of interest between the leader and the public, a public relation must be able to negotiate to defend the interests of the institution and the public (Tam, L., et. Al., 2020). Public Relations provides education, persuasion and advocacy to defend the interests of both parties. The task of the PR is to explain, provide understanding and convince the leader of the MPR activities that will be carried out. Another study explains that public relations practitioners need managerial skills and interpersonal communication in an effort to convince leaders so that leaders understand MPR activities in universities (Choi, J., & Choi, Y. 2009) (Varey, R. 1996).

Apathetic. Apathy is the biggest enemy of PR, because it is a major obstacle to creating understanding. Lack of information in colleges or universities leads to scepticism from the public (Peyronel, A. C. 2000). This reluctance, indifference and ignorance is basically the product of excessive ego, laziness, limited imagination, or is solely the result of an inadequate or unattractive way of presenting a new subject so that it is unable to provoke public interest and trust. Public relations can convince the schools by providing an interesting narrative that can create emotional closeness when dealing with the schools, so that they give permission and time for the higher education institutions to provide roadshows or presentations at the schools. One indicator of public relations competence is changing apathy in public attitudes to empathy (Jin, Y. 2010).

Ignorance. This ignorant attitude is a common disease that to some extent

is still considered normal. Often PR is trapped in the wrong assumption, namely that the public knows a subject as well as we do. Public Relations feels that the public already understands the concept of MPR, even though not all internal and external publics understand the concept of MPR. The job of PR is to provide explanations and understanding to leaders and employees about the concept of MPR, so that they know the true MPR concept. A public relations officer must provide information to the public about the organization and its services, and also respond to media or public inquiries, the latest news, or topical issues of the organization that provoke public interest or attention (Ristino, R. J. 2008).

Some of the causes of problems in PR are the limited human resources in the PR department who are experts and competent in the field of public relations, as well as the policy of universities that rotate educators regardless of the qualifications of expertise and skills they have to be placed in the PR department. There must be competency standards tailored to the needs of public relations work, for example skills in writing articles, photography, managing events, public speaking, creating social media content, design, and leadership. Public relations skills are indispensable in the current service era, therefore, Public Relations education must include a curriculum that supports professional skills (Bedics, B. C., & Hall, M. N., 1987). A study explains that higher education institutions invest more resources to achieve good perceptions among their stakeholders (Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando, A., Zorrilla, P., & Forcada, J., 2018), therefore, there is nothing wrong with leadership in providing opportunities for public relations staff to take part in training to improve professional competence.

The implementation time for focused MPR activities is from October



to February each year. This time must be adjusted to the information needs of the target MPR activities. Due to the five months, and many activities usually accumulate in the periode, Public Relations cannot serve all the desires of the target to make face-to-face presentations at school.

PR activities are not only carried out outside the campus but also in campus. One of the tasks is to build the image of the higher education institution. Less representative campus facilities can provide an unfavorable picture (image) in front of the external public. In a competitive situation, the image of an institution in higher education is very important, especially about academic services (Pérez, J. P., & Torres, E. M. 2017). The positive image of higher education is not only seen from academic services but also from non-academic services such as corporate identity and facilities on campus. A study conducted on two higher education institutions in the United Kingdom explained that public relations services and activities have a positive effect on the image and reputation of the institution (Spatzier, A., & Breu, J. 2018). To provide services to the internal and external public, Public Relations must improve skills and competencies through routine training.

Budget is often one of the obstacles in MPR activities (Zwijze-Koning, K. H., De Jong, M. D., & Van Vuuren, M. 2015) (Austin, E. W., Pinkleton, B. E., & Dixon, A. 2000). In fact, the policies of higher education leaders sometimes do not support MPR budget proposals so that they cannot work according to the planning. Because creativity and innovation are the basis for public relations education (Spatzier, A., & Breu, J. 2018), PR must be creative and innovative in carrying out MPR activities by utilizing existing budgets with

implementation that can reach all targets of PR marketing activities.

### **Resolving Obstacles in Marketing PR with Narrative Paradigm Theory (Walter Fisher)**

One of the biggest obstacles in MPR activities is the negative prejudice from the internal public. Prejudice is part of conflict in an organization, while conflict is an aspect that cannot be avoided in a relationship. To resolve conflicts that occur in organizations, Public Relations must build collaborations. Collaboration means that all parties work together to solve problems to maintain productive relationships that will overcome differences of opinion when working together to achieve certain goals. The essence of marketing public relations activities is collaboration, collectivity, and communal relationships (Grunig, J. E. 2000). Yuningsih and Mulyana (2017) explain that there needs to be group communication skills practiced by leaders of private universities, namely skills to build a solid and loyal work team, skills to manage conflicts that often arise internally, and communication skills to build and increasing collaboration between various human resources and existing facilities, as well as skills to provide support for subordinates' initiatives. This study explains that when PR collaborates with the internal public, Public Relations must build a solid - loyal team to manage differences in perceptions with the internal public. Public relations, as a storyteller, can 'narrate some stories' to equalize perceptions with employees and leaders whose position is the listener.

The narrative paradigm expresses the belief that humans are storytellers and that consideration of values, emotions, and aesthetics form the basis of human beliefs and behavior. People are more



persuaded by a good story than by a good argument. Fisher stated that the essence of human nature is to tell stories. Griffin (2006: 518) places narrative as a paradigm (narrative paradigm) in the context of group and public communication. Basically, a narrative is a text that has been constructed in some way to present, so that it represents a series of events or actions that are felt to be logically related to one another or have their own ties. Narrative or stories are commonly used in social media, internal public messages, MPR, advertising, feature writing, branding, reputation-image, and so on. Almost all messages or narratives that are delivered are adapted to the context (Kent, M. L. 2015).

In general, narrative theory concludes that persuasion will be more effective if the messages are compiled in a descriptive-narrative in the form of stories (storytelling) by prioritizing the emotional aspects of the audience rather than the rational aspects. The basic assumption of this narrative paradigm also occurs in an institution. Internal activities of institutions are mostly communication activities, where the public is required to have storytelling skills (Zwijze-Koning, K. H., De Jong, M. D., & Van Vuuren, M. 2015). The Homo Narrans paradigm represents a communication-centered perspective for public relations (Vasquez, G. M, 1993). The day-to-day activities of public relations include telling and managing stories about individuals, organizations and groups. The narrative or story that is conveyed is not fiction but a structured everyday story, every word contained in the story has a meaning (Kent, M. L. 2015). Public Relations practitioners are expected to seek to influence the existing narrative in society by presenting stories about their organization. Wasesa<sup>1</sup> stated that, “in the era of social media,

storytelling has returned to be popular and has become an effective strategy for organizations to build engagement with the public. Storytelling is important because it can penetrate the subconscious mind, break down the comfort zone, and undermine the domination of public perception”.

Public Relations explains, understands and persuades internal and external audiences through the use of 'narrative' or stories that can be trusted (good reason). The added value of the stories is that they can add understanding factors and personal relationships that cannot be achieved only by data and analysis (Gill, R, 2015). When the internal public gives an opinion that MPR activities outside the city are an outing activity carried out by the PR team, they can be given an explanation and understanding using a narrative. PR provides a narrative (storytelling) that inspires the emotional aspect of the internal public regarding PR activities when conducting roadshows or presentations at schools located in remote areas for a limited time. In one day, the PR team can make presentations at three different schools at a great distance, of course with limited personnel and budget. The aspect of physical limitations of the PR team is no longer considered. The most important thing is that they can give presentations and explain to students about the higher education institution, so that students recognize it.

Narrative is a text that has been constructed in a certain way, so that it represents a series of events or actions that are considered to be logically related to one another and have their own links (Sobur, 2014: vi). This study explains that PR, as a storyteller, constructs stories that are not only rational in nature, but also include a chronological approach that touches on the internal emotions of

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the public as story listeners. The chronological approach means that Public Relations describes events according to the process of time. The narrative delivered by PR does not talk about the rational, argumentative aspect, but rather is an interesting storyline. A story that can stimulate the other side of human nature, namely a creature who likes to tell stories, and this is the basic principle of the narrative paradigm. The process of constructing a narrative and producing meaning is dynamic, because each individual interacts with others, thus influencing how to create and interpret the narrative. In a story, the message conveyed must evoke emotion and energy in the listener. It takes rationality, creativity, and broad insight to design arguments using conventional rhetoric (Woodside, A. G. 2010).

West and Turner (2008), explain that managers who are able to use narrative as a rhetorical method with employees, will have greater success in workplace communication than managers who cannot use narrative. Gill, R. (2015) in his research in Australia, found that storytelling can increase internal loyalty to the company's brand, which in turn strengthens internal and external reputation. Stories or narratives are valuable media to engage the public in enhancing reputation because narrative is the main key to communication concepts and strategies (Gray, J. B. 2009). Narrative allows managers to build relationships with diverse audiences to a higher degree than the technical argument. That is, PR can use narration as a method to explain to employees or leaders about how to implement MPR activities in the field in interactions with students, teachers, and schools that are so complex. This means that the narrative delivered by PR must contain the value of cooperation and understanding, where cooperation

between PR and the public is a "door" to reach a mutual understanding. Public Relations must improve their skills in negotiating and gain influence when communicating their disagreements with top management in conflict decision making (Jin, Y., 2010). In addition, the communication value that must be considered by PR when telling stories with the public is the politeness aspect. In the context of this research, politeness is an act of verbal and non-verbal communication of Public Relations which is gentle, civilized, non-blaming, verbally polite, and able to protect others' feelings.

Public relations is required to build a narrative (language) that explains the current situation, describes the possibilities of problem-solving processes in MPR activities, and plans activities to be carried out in the future. Public relations as a communicator (storyteller) is required to provide information in the form of a narrative to the leadership. The narrative messages that are created and delivered to leaders must involve emotional aspects and not only display statistical data but also contain communication values of appreciation, cooperation, understanding, and politeness. Storytelling is not the only approach used in fostering relationships with the public, telling stories needs to consider various communication techniques in order to be able to provide opportunities to share meaning and mutual understanding in differences (Gill. R. 2001). When Public Relations conveyed about the need to increase the competence of Public Relations staff in using the latest MPR media, there was a need for a narrative to be conveyed to the leadership about the current trend of MPR media which is more virtual.

To convince teachers and schools in determining the schedule for roadshows or presentations at school, PR



expertise is needed in building relationships and cooperation. With the experience of Public Relations interacting with teachers and schools, Public Relations constructs narratives and produces meanings. Interaction with teachers and schools, namely the process of sharing narratives, and PR will select narratives that support the interaction process. Convincing them by presenting facts and logical arguments is not enough. But it needs the ability to form a coherent narrative that can stimulate the emotional aspect.

Narrative messages conveyed by PR as storytellers to the external public must involve the emotional aspects of the audience, not only display relational data. Media adverts, brochures and press releases are not just seen as one-way communication, but also function to build a dialogue between universities and the public, where institutions and the public try to create a mutual understanding. The public will have a perception about whether the narrative made by the university contains coherence or not, because the public, as homo narrans, has their own sense of story. This means that the public will compare the narrative made by the public relations of higher education with the narrative that already exists in the public about the college.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the barriers to MPR activities in universities are internal, where management and staff do not understand the concept of MPR and are prejudiced against it. Other internal barriers include a lack of human resources in the PR department, budgets that are not in accordance with submissions, and university policies that do not support MPR activities are also among the internal obstacles that arise. Barriers to the external public occur because of differences in regulations

between universities and schools. In an effort to overcome these obstacles, the public relations of higher education must be able to do storytelling, where the PR tells stories using narratives that touch the cognitive and emotional aspects of the public. Public Relations must be able to explain and convince the public about MPR activities. The results of this study are expected to help higher education PR to anticipate and overcome obstacles in MPR activities by using the narrative paradigm theory, where public relations must have the ability to tell stories using narrative which is not only based on data in the field but also touches the emotional aspects of the public. In the future, research can be carried out on the effectiveness of applying the theory of narrative paradigms in MPR activities.

## CREDIT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

**Tresna Wiwitan:** writing-conceptual draft, methodology, discussion, **Neni Yulianita:** Writing, theory and research findings, conclusion **Sophia Novita:** collecting references and transcripts

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organizations related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

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