



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS THE CONTROVERSY OF HIGH-PAYING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses strategies to increase parents' trust in private schools through fee transparency, utilization of social media, and involvement of community leaders. The purpose of the study was to identify and analyze effective approaches in building trusting relationships between schools and parents, particularly in the context of high education costs. This research used a qualitative method with a case study approach at MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews with parents, community leaders, and school officials, as well as direct observation and document analysis related to school policies. Data were analyzed descriptively using theoretical approaches, including social exchange theory, uses and gratifications, and image restoration. The results show that transparency in fee management gives parents confidence about the benefits received by students. The use of social media succeeded in building a positive image of the school by showcasing student success and excellent programs. In addition, the involvement of community leaders proved to increase the school's credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the community. This study concludes that open communication, effective digital strategies and the support of community leaders are key to building trust and harmonious relationships between schools and parents, while reducing potential conflicts related to high education costs.

Keywords: *Transparency of Tuition Fees, Positive School Image, Communication Strategy*

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INTRODUCTION

The controversy over tuition fees in private schools such as MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar reflects the social and economic complexities of education in Indonesia. On the one hand, private schools are often seen as a solution to providing quality education that is difficult to afford in public schools, especially in resource-constrained areas. However, the high cost of education in such schools is often a

source of debate, especially among people with lower middle income ([Saihu & Siregar, 2022](#)).

In this context, effective communication strategies are key for MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar to overcome the controversies that arise. As an educational institution, it is important for this school to be transparent about the fee structure and benefits provided to students ([Mulyah, 2020](#)). Open and inclusive communication can help build community trust ([Suhartingsih, 2012](#)). One strategy that can be implemented is to organize discussion forums with parents to explain in detail the use of school funds, such as improving the quality of facilities, procuring qualified teachers, and student development programs.

In addition, the use of social media and digital communication channels can be leveraged to disseminate information widely and responsively. Narratives that focus on student success, support for underprivileged students and the school's commitment to education quality can help defuse criticism and enhance a positive image in the community. Another strategy is to involve community leaders or successful alumni as supporters in bridging communication between the school and the wider community ([Mauliddiyah, 2021](#); [Prabowo & Hafid, 2024](#)).

Previous research relevant to this discussion is research by Nim, (2022) which discusses the importance of transparency in communication between schools and parents to reduce tensions related to education costs. The study showed that private schools that adopted an open communication strategy, including explaining the fee structure and use of school funds, were able to build trust and reduce skepticism among parents. Another aligned research is a study conducted by [Hidayah et al., \(2023\)](#) that effective utilization of social media can strengthen the relationship between schools and the community and spread positive information about the quality of education and facilities provided, despite the high cost of education.

However, the novelty of this research lies in the holistic approach that integrates various communication strategies in overcoming the controversy of higher education costs in private schools, especially in MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar. Unlike previous studies that often focus on one aspect only, such as fee transparency or the use of social media, this study proposes a broader and more comprehensive combination of several communication elements.

One of the main innovations raised was the importance of organizing discussion forums involving parents as the party most affected by education costs (Fitroni, 2024). This forum is not only a venue for clarification but also a space for schools to demonstrate their commitment to education quality and accessibility, especially for underprivileged students. In addition, this study also introduces the role of community leaders and alumni as a bridge in communication between the school and the community. Using respected local figures can help build greater trust, so that the community feels more connected and confident in the decisions made by the school.

The main objective of this study is to develop effective communication strategies that can be used by MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar in addressing controversies related to higher education costs, with the aim of increasing understanding, building trust, and reducing tension among the community, especially parents. The argument underlying this objective is that open, inclusive and transparent communication can be key in creating harmonious relationships between schools and communities, especially in dealing with sensitive issues such as tuition fees.

The surrounding community, especially parents, often feel marginalized or disadvantaged if tuition fees are deemed incompatible with their economic capacity. Therefore, through more responsive communication approaches, such as discussion forums, effective use of social media and the active role of community leaders and alumni, schools can provide clarification, demonstrate their commitment to education quality and support students from underprivileged families. Thus, this research aims to find communication solutions that can improve the school's image while ensuring more equitable and fair access to education for all levels of society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, which aims to explore in depth the communication strategies implemented by MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar in overcoming the controversy of high-paying education. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of various related parties, such as principals, teachers, parents, alumni, and the surrounding community ([Thalib, 2022](#)). In this way, this research can provide a more comprehensive picture of the communication dynamics that occur in the context of religious-based private schools.

The data collection methods used are in-depth interviews, participatory observation and documentation studies. In-depth interviews will be conducted with various school stakeholders, including school management, parents, and alumni. These interviews aim to understand how they perceive the tuition fee policy and how they respond to the communication made by the school ([Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020](#)). Participatory observation is conducted by observing the interactions that occur in the school environment, both in formal and informal events, to see how communication takes place between the school and the community. Documentation study will be used to analyze official documents related to the tuition fee policy, as well as communication materials used by the school, such as brochures, websites and social media. Data analysis is conducted using a thematic analysis approach, where the researcher will identify the main themes that emerge from the collected data. These themes will be used to illustrate the most effective communication strategies and how they can help reduce controversy over higher education costs. The researcher will also relate these findings to communication theory and public image management theory to provide a strong theoretical foundation for the research findings ([Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020](#); [Prabowo & Aimah, 2024](#)).

This research method is expected to provide in-depth insight into the ways in which MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar can manage communication to increase transparency, improve the school's image, and defuse controversies that arise regarding education costs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fee Transparency to Increase Trust

When schools face controversy over higher education fees, there is often a lack of understanding and concern among parents about how their money is being spent. Therefore, transparency in fee management is key to reducing tensions and building a more solid relationship between the school and parents. Providing clear information on the allocation of funds for various needs, such as facilities, teaching and student development programs, provides a more objective picture of the value received by students and parents. Thus, parents feel more confident that the fees they pay will be used for the benefit of their children's education, not just for profit ([Muliyah, 2020](#); [Musnandar et al., 2024](#)).

This is at least able to reduce the worries of student guardians about the costs incurred while their children are educated at the institution. Those who initially doubted became comfortable with the business, this is based on an interview with one of the parents of students who have children attending MTs Unggulan Fathussalam, Mr. Imam Syafi'i said:

"At first, I was hesitant about the fees that we have to pay for this school, as they are higher compared to public schools. However, after the school held a meeting and explained openly about how the fees were used to improve facilities and teaching quality, I began to feel more comfortable. They explained in detail, from the cost of renovating classrooms to procuring competent teachers. This made me more confident that the money I was paying was being used wisely for the benefit of my child's education. This kind of transparency is very important, especially for those of us who come from families with limited income."

From this it can be seen that when schools can explain clearly and openly about the allocation of costs, parents feel more trusting and ready to support school policies. A detailed and structured explanation provides a clearer picture of the benefits students receive, which in turn reduces concerns and uncertainties.

Clear and open communication about the use of education funds can reduce the misunderstandings that often arise due to high fees in private schools. Parents tend to be more supportive of schools when they understand in detail the allocation of the fees they pay, including for the improvement of education quality, facilities and student welfare. In this case, transparency serves as a tool to build a more trusting relationship between the school and parents and reduce potential conflicts or dissatisfaction arising from costs that are perceived to be disproportionate to the benefits received ([Nim, 2022](#)).

These results are relevant to the ideas put forward by [Muttaqien, \(2023\)](#) which states that relationships between individuals or groups are based on the exchange of resources that are considered mutually beneficial. In this context, parents expect value that is proportional to the costs they incur, and cost transparency provides a clear picture of the "value" they get, so that the relationship between parents and schools becomes more stable. As explained by [Qurtubi, \(2020\)](#) open communication in organizations can reduce tensions and increase collaboration between parties, as individuals feel that they have control over relevant information and can make informed decisions. In other words, when parents feel well-informed, they are more likely to support school policies, which results in increased trust and participation in school activities.

The Role of Social Media in Building a Positive Image

The role of social media in building a positive image of private schools, especially MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar, is an important aspect in overcoming the controversy over higher education costs. In today's digital era, social media is not only a fast communication tool, but also has great power in shaping public perception ([Chaniago, 2020](#)). Many schools use these platforms to disseminate information related to student achievement, quality of education, and the excellent programs they offer. By using social media effectively, schools can reach a wider audience and paint a more positive picture of the value and benefits offered, despite the high tuition fees charged.

This study found that narratives that emphasize student success, support for underprivileged students, and teaching quality can reduce negative criticism and improve the school's image in the eyes of the community. This result is further strengthened by the evidence of an interview with one of the parents, Mrs. Siti, with the following interview excerpt:

"I initially heard a lot of complaints from friends about the high fees at this school. However, after I followed the school's social media accounts, I came to better understand what they are doing with the fees. Through posts that often share student success stories and the various programs they run; I can see the quality of education provided."

This interview illustrates that social media can serve as an effective tool to provide more transparent and positive information about schools. By utilizing these platforms to showcase the school's successes and commitment to quality education, the school can defuse criticism and build a better image in the eyes of the community.

Social media can be a very effective tool in changing people's perception of the high tuition fees applied by private schools. With platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar can disseminate more positive and transparent information about the quality of education, the facilities provided, and the various excellent programs they run. Student success stories, academic achievements, and social activities involving the community can improve the school's image and give parents and the community a more complete picture of the benefits obtained by

students, despite the relatively high tuition fees. As seen in the interview with Mrs. Siti, social media helps to reduce negative perceptions and increase parents' understanding and trust in the quality of education offered by the school ([Rahmat, 2021](#)).

These results are directly proportional to the research conducted by Cahya et al., (2023) which states that individuals are active in choosing and using media to fulfill their needs, such as information, entertainment, and social interaction. In this context, parents like Mrs. Siti are looking for information that can help them make decisions about their child's education. By providing informative and relevant content through social media, the school can fulfill these needs, thereby improving its image and building a more positive relationship with its audience. This evidence is further corroborated by research by [Sitompul, \(2021\)](#) which explains how organizations can improve their image by using strategic communication to deliver messages that deflect criticism and reinforce positive narratives.

Involvement of Community Leaders Increases Trust

Community leaders who are respected and recognized in the community can be an effective communication bridge between the school and the wider community. Public trust in a school is often influenced by how it is received in the community. When community leaders, such as religious leaders, successful alumni or other local figures, support and speak positively about the school, it can increase the school's credibility in the eyes of parents and the community ([Suhartingsih, 2020](#)). Their involvement not only gives legitimacy to the policies taken by the school, but also shows that the school has broad support from various respected parties.

To formulate this result, there was an interview conducted with Mr. Hadi, a community leader who is also an alumnus of MTs Unggulan Fathussalam Muncar. The following is an excerpt from the interview:

"I often talk to other parents and advise them to look beyond the cost. When I talk about MTs Unggulan Fathussalam, I try to convey the positive things I experienced while attending school here. I think parents are more trusting when they hear support from someone they respect, especially if I can show what this school is doing to improve the quality of education."

These interviews suggest that the involvement of community leaders in supporting schools can play an important role in reducing community skepticism about the high cost of education. The support of respected figures has a great influence on parents' trust, which in turn improves the relationship between the school and the community.

The interpretation of this finding is that the involvement of respected community leaders, such as Mr. Hadi, has a significant impact on increasing community trust in educational institutions. The support provided is not only in the form of words, but also personal experiences that build legitimacy for the school within its community. This is in line with social capital theory Syarifudin & Ishak, (2020), which states that social relations and trust play an important role in strengthening community

cohesion. Trust in community leaders serves as a "social bridge" that connects the community with educational institutions, creating a multiplier effect on the acceptance and legitimacy of school policies.

A previous study by Oktavia & Khotimah, (2023) also highlights the importance of trust in the context of education, where it asserts that social capital in the form of interpersonal relationships can influence parents' educational decisions. In this context, the role of community leaders becomes a strategic instrument to reduce skepticism regarding the high cost of education. When successful alumni like Mr. Hadi speak from their experience, they reinforce the perception that investing in education at a particular school has significant long-term value.

Research by Falah, Waromi, & Sulistiawan, (2024) underlines that the involvement of community leaders not only strengthens trust, but also expands the network of support that can help schools in strengthening reputation. In this case, the involvement of figures such as Mr. Hadi created a positive narrative that reduced the negative perceptions of the community. This finding underscores the relevance of social capital theory and interpersonal communication in strengthening the relationship between schools and communities and emphasizes the importance of engaging respected figures to build the credibility of educational institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

This research shows that cost transparency, the role of social media and the involvement of community leaders are important factors in increasing parents' trust in schools. Cost transparency through open explanations about the allocation of funds has proven to be effective in reducing parents' concerns, especially regarding the benefits received by students. By providing clear information, schools are able to create more solid trust among parents.

Social media also plays an important role in building a positive image of the school by conveying narratives of student success, excellent programs and the school's commitment to quality education. The use of these digital platforms helps the school reach a wider audience and gives the community a better understanding of the benefits of education despite the high cost. In addition, the involvement of community leaders such as successful alumni or religious leaders in supporting the school strengthens the institution's credibility in the eyes of the community. Their support not only increases parents' trust but also reduces skepticism towards school policies. Overall, a transparent communication strategy, effective use of social media and support from community leaders can create a more harmonious relationship between schools and parents and help overcome negative perceptions of higher education costs in private schools. These findings are relevant to be applied as a model in building public trust in educational institutions.

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