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Public Relations Role In Enhancing University Image Through Instagram Content

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Abstract. This study examines the role of Public Relations of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu in enhancing a positive institutional image through Instagram content. The problem addressed is the need for higher education institutions to maintain public trust and visibility amid increasingly competitive digital communication. This research used a descriptive qualitative method with observation, interviews, documentation, and audience crosscheck. Informants consisted of the Head of Public Relations, the Instagram social media administrator, one student, and one community follower of the official Instagram account @dehasen. Data were analyzed using the Honeycomb Model, which includes identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. The results show that Instagram functions as a strategic communication medium for publishing institutional identity, campus activities, achievements, accreditation, partnerships, and admission information. Audience responses indicate that the content supports a positive image by portraying the university as active, open, informative, and reputable.

Keywords: *Public Relations, Positive Image, Instagram, Honeycomb Model, Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu.*

INTRODUCTION

Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu, as a higher education institution, faces the need to strengthen its reputation and positive image in the middle of increasingly tight competition among universities. Digital public relations plays an important role as the institutional communication front line because public perception is influenced by how the university manages narratives, information, and visual identity through online platforms, especially Instagram (Rozanah, 2016; Hidayat, 2014).

In the current digital communication environment, social media often becomes the first space where prospective students, students, alumni, and the wider community form impressions about a university. For this reason, the official Instagram account is not only used to publish information, but also functions as a visible representation of institutional credibility, openness, and campus identity.

Figure 1. Official Instagram Account Of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu (@Dehasen)



Source: Research documentation from the thesis manuscript, 2026.

Instagram is relevant for public relations because it allows institutions to display activities, achievements, admission information, and public interaction through visual and interactive content. In the context of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu, the official account @dehasen is used to publish campus activities, accreditation information, student and lecturer achievements, collaborations, and new-student admission information. The account displays 21,001 followers and 1,234 posts, showing that Instagram has become an important public communication channel for the university.

The urgency of maintaining a positive image is also reflected in new-student admission data. University academic data show that applicants increased from 2,889 in 2024 to 3,296 in 2025, while accepted students increased from 2,496 to 2,832 in the same period. Although 2026 data were still not final, the existence of admission data indicates that public trust and public interest must continue to be supported through effective public relations communication. Therefore, this study asks how Public Relations of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu uses Instagram to enhance a positive institutional image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Public Relations

Digital public relations refers to public relations activities that use internet-based media as channels for publicity and interaction. Onggo (2004) explains that digital public relations uses online media to communicate with the public. Laksamana (2015) adds that digital platforms can help organizations build brands, maintain trust, and preserve a positive image. In this study, Instagram is understood as a digital public relations platform that allows the university to distribute information quickly and interactively.

Positive Image

A positive image is the favorable perception formed in the minds of the public toward an organization. It is related to trust, reputation, quality, and public support. Tiwari (2023) describes positive image as an optimistic but realistic view that highlights values, strengths, and potential without ignoring weaknesses. In the context of this study, positive image refers to the public impression that Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu is active, open, informative, and reputable.

Instagram Content

Instagram content consists of visual, audio, and textual materials uploaded to communicate, inform, entertain, or promote messages to followers. For public relations,

Instagram content can include feed posts, stories, reels, live sessions, and guides. These formats support different communication goals, from maintaining profile aesthetics to increasing engagement and real-time interaction (Nasrullah, 2017).

Honeycomb Model

The Honeycomb Model by Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) explains seven functional building blocks of social media: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. This model is suitable for analyzing how Instagram is used by university public relations because it connects visual identity, audience interaction, information sharing, real-time presence, relationship building, reputation validation, and community segmentation.

Public Trust and Institutional Reputation

Positive institutional image is closely related to public trust. Trust is formed when audiences receive consistent information, see evidence of quality, and feel that the institution communicates openly. In this study, public trust is understood through the way Instagram content presents achievements, accreditation, partnerships, and campus activities. These materials become symbolic evidence that the university is active and developing. When the information is repeated consistently, the public can remember the university through its achievements and identity. This process supports reputation formation because reputation is built through accumulated impressions over time, not only through one campaign or one post (Ardianto et al., 2014; Tiwari, 2023).

Engagement and Two-Way Communication

Digital public relations requires interaction. Instagram allows audiences to respond through likes, comments, shares, direct messages, mentions, and story reactions. These responses are important because public relations is no longer limited to one-way publication. In the context of university communication, two-way interaction can help the Public Relations team understand questions, expectations, and complaints from students, prospective students, alumni, and the wider community. The conversation element of the Honeycomb Model is therefore important because the quality of response influences whether audiences perceive the institution as responsive, open, and caring (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Nasrullah, 2017).

METHODS

Understand the role of digital public relations in managing Instagram communication to enhance the positive image of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu. Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the meanings, experiences, and communication practices behind the management of institutional social media (Moleong, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019).

Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and crosscheck with Instagram audiences. Observation was conducted on the official Instagram account @dehasen to identify content patterns, visual identity, interaction, and institutional messages. Interviews were conducted with internal informants who directly manage public relations and Instagram content. Documentation was used to support findings through screenshots and published content. Crosscheck was conducted with one student and one community follower to understand audience perception.

Table 1. Research Informants

No.	Name	Status/Position	Function in the Study
1	Eko Suryana, M.Kom.	Head of Public Relations, Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu	Provided information on public relations policy, duties, and digital communication management.
2	Anggun Revina, S.T.	Instagram social media administrator, Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu	Provided information on content management, account development, and follower responses.
3	Riski Defa Agung	Student of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu	Provided internal audience responses regarding Instagram content and campus information.
4	Damayanti	Community member/follower of @dehasen	Provided external audience perceptions of the university image through Instagram content.

Table 2. Data Collection Matrix

Technique	Data Collected	Purpose
Observation	Posts, captions, visual identity, account profile, comments, Stories, and content themes from @dehasen.	To identify visible public relations practices and Instagram content patterns.
Interview	Statements from Public Relations and Instagram administrator about content planning, publication, and interaction.	To understand internal communication strategy and management process.
Documentation	Screenshots of Instagram account, posts, comments, achievements, and institutional information.	To strengthen findings with visual evidence from published content.
Crosscheck	Responses from student and community informants regarding their perception of @dehasen content.	To confirm whether Instagram content is perceived as supporting a positive image.

The data analysis followed the Honeycomb Model categories. Each finding was grouped into seven elements: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. The researcher then compared interview data, observation results, documentation, and audience crosscheck to build a coherent interpretation. This analytical procedure was conducted to avoid relying only on internal claims from the Public Relations side. By comparing observation, documentation, and audience responses, the study could describe whether the content strategy was actually visible and meaningful for audiences (Moleong, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULTS

The findings show that Instagram is used by Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu Public Relations as a strategic medium for institutional communication. The account is not only used to distribute information but also to represent university identity, strengthen engagement, and display institutional achievements. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 3. Findings Based on the Honeycomb Model

Element	Public Relations Practice on Instagram	Contribution to Positive Image
Identity	Uses the university logo, institutional colors, visual design, and formal-informative language style.	Makes the account recognizable and strengthens institutional identity.
Conversations	Responds to comments and uses interactive features when needed.	Creates two-way communication and shows that the university is responsive.
Sharing	Publishes campus activities, student and lecturer achievements, academic information, partnerships, and admission content.	Shows the university as active, productive, and informative.
Presence	Uses Stories and recent updates to show ongoing campus activities.	Builds the impression that the institution is present and active in public communication.
Relationships	Reposts student activities and displays content involving the academic community.	Creates emotional closeness and student pride.
Reputation	Publishes accreditation, collaborations, institutional achievements, and student accomplishments.	Validates quality and strengthens public trust.
Groups	Segments content for prospective students, active students, alumni, and the general public; uses hashtags.	Helps messages reach different audience groups more effectively.

Table 4. Instagram Content Strategy and Image Indicators

Content Category	Example of Content	Image Indicator
Institutional identity	Logo, campus colors, profile information, official captions, and announcement templates.	The university appears organized, official, and easy to recognize.
Academic activities	Lectures, seminars, student orientation, campus events, and academic services.	The university appears active in academic development.
Achievement content	Student achievements, lecturer achievements, accreditation, and competition results.	The university appears reputable and competitive.
Partnership content	Cooperation with institutions, community programs, and public service activities.	The university appears collaborative and socially connected.
Admission information	New-student admission posts, registration instructions, and promotional content.	The university appears accessible for prospective students.

Audience interaction	Replies to comments, reposts, hashtags, and story engagement.	The university appears responsive and close to its audience.
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The content categories in Table 4 show that Instagram management is connected with several image indicators. Institutional identity builds recognizability; academic activity content builds the impression of productivity; achievement content strengthens credibility; partnership content displays social relevance; admission information supports accessibility; and audience interaction strengthens closeness. These categories are important because a positive image in higher education is not formed through one type of post, but through a combination of informative, emotional, and reputational messages.

In the identity element, Public Relations displays consistent visual characteristics through the use of the university logo, colors, and design style. This consistency helps audiences recognize the official account and associate the content with Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu. In the conversations element, the existence of positive comments such as “terbaik dehasen” and “the best nian dehasen awak” indicates that audiences give supportive responses to university posts.

In the sharing element, the account regularly publishes activities, student achievements, academic events, partnerships, and admission information. These posts help audiences understand the university’s activities and institutional value. In the presence element, Stories and current activity updates make the university appear active and accessible to followers. In the relationships element, reposting student activities gives recognition to students and can build pride among the academic community.

In the reputation element, Public Relations uses Instagram to display accreditation, institutional collaborations, certifications, and achievements. These contents become visual evidence of institutional quality. In the groups element, the university attempts to reach different audiences through content segmentation, such as prospective students, active students, alumni, and the general public.

Picture 2. Example Of Achievement Content Published On Instagram



Source: Research documentation from the thesis manuscript, 2026.

Picture 3. Example Of Instagram Content Used For Audience Engagement



Source: Research documentation from the thesis manuscript, 2026.

Picture 3 illustrates that Instagram content does not only function as an archive of institutional activities, but also as a communication stimulus. When content is uploaded in attractive visual form, audiences can easily identify the message, remember the activity, and respond through Instagram features. In public relations practice, this response becomes feedback that can be used to evaluate content relevance and audience interest.

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that Instagram can function as a public relations medium for constructing a positive university image. The use of consistent identity supports institutional recognition, while publication of achievements and activities helps audiences see the university as productive and credible. This finding is consistent with the concept of digital public relations, which emphasizes the use of online media to build trust, interaction, and organizational reputation (Onggo, 2004; Laksamana, 2015).

The Honeycomb Model helps explain why Instagram content can influence image formation. Identity and sharing make the institution visible and understandable. Conversations and relationships support interaction and closeness. Presence makes the institution appear active. Reputation provides proof of quality through achievements and accreditation. Groups help Public Relations direct messages to audience segments. Together, these elements indicate that Instagram management is not merely technical posting activity but part of strategic communication (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Audience crosscheck strengthens the internal findings. Riski Defa Agung, as a student, stated that Instagram content helps students obtain campus information and makes them aware of student activities and achievements. Damayanti, as an external audience member, viewed the university as active, open, and recognized because of posts about achievements, partnerships, and campus activities. These responses show that content published by Public Relations is received by audiences as positive institutional representation.

Table 5. Audience Crosscheck Summary

Informant		Audience Position	Main Response	Meaning for Positive Image
Riski Agung	Defa	Internal audience/student	Instagram content helps students obtain campus information and see student activities and	The university is perceived as informative and supportive of student pride.

		achievements.
Damayanti	External audience/follower	Posts about The university is achievements, perceived as reputable, cooperation, and campus visible, and trusted by activities make the the public. university look active and open.

The crosscheck summary indicates that the same content can create different but complementary meanings. For students, Instagram supports access to internal information and strengthens belongingness. For external audiences, Instagram provides public evidence that the institution is active and credible. This difference is important because university public relations has multiple publics. A single Instagram account must communicate with students, prospective students, parents, alumni, partners, and the general community at the same time. Therefore, content planning should consider both informational needs and reputational needs.

From the perspective of the Honeycomb Model, the audience responses show the connection between sharing, reputation, and relationships. Sharing provides information, reputation gives quality signals, and relationships create closeness between the university and its followers. These elements support one another. When the university shares achievements without interaction, the content may look formal but distant. When the account interacts without strong reputation content, it may appear friendly but less convincing. A strong Instagram public relations strategy therefore needs balance between information, proof of quality, and audience engagement.

The increase in new-student applicants from 2024 to 2025 also supports the importance of maintaining a positive image. Although admission growth cannot be attributed only to Instagram, the data show that public trust and interest toward the university must be supported by continuous, consistent, and responsive communication. Therefore, Instagram should continue to be managed as a strategic communication channel for public relations, reputation building, and audience engagement.

Practical Implications for Instagram Management

The findings also provide practical implications for the Public Relations team. First, the account should maintain a clear content calendar so that institutional information is not uploaded only when there is an event, but also as part of continuous image management. Second, each post should be planned according to audience needs. Prospective students need admission information, program advantages, scholarship opportunities, campus atmosphere, and student testimonials. Active students need academic announcements, activity documentation, and recognition of achievements. Alumni and partners need content that highlights reputation, collaboration, and institutional development. This audience-based planning is in line with the groups element of the Honeycomb Model because different publics require different messages (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Third, the Public Relations team should strengthen the conversation element by replying to relevant comments, answering common questions through Stories, and using interactive features such as question boxes, polls, and live sessions. Interaction should not be treated only as a technical feature, but as a way to show that the university is present and responsive. Fourth, reputation content should be packaged in simple language and attractive design. Accreditation, achievements, and partnerships are strong reputation materials, but they need to be translated into visual messages that are easy for audiences to understand. This means that captions, images, and layout should work together to communicate meaning clearly.

Table 6. Recommended Instagram Management Plan

Management Aspect	Recommended Action	Expected Image Benefit
Content planning	Prepare a monthly content calendar containing academic activities, achievements, admission information, and community engagement.	The university appears consistent, active, and well managed.
Audience segmentation	Differentiate content for prospective students, current students, alumni, partners, and the general public.	Messages become more relevant and easier to understand by each audience group.
Interaction management	Use comments, direct messages, polls, question boxes, and live sessions to answer audience needs.	The university appears responsive, open, and close to its public.
Reputation packaging	Present accreditation, achievements, and cooperation through simple captions, strong visuals, and clear source information.	The university appears credible and trustworthy.
Evaluation	Review reach, engagement, comments, and audience feedback to determine which content should be improved.	Public relations activities become more adaptive and evidence-based.

Based on Table 6, Instagram management should be understood as a continuous public relations cycle. Planning determines what message should be delivered; production transforms the message into visual content; publication makes the message accessible to audiences; interaction builds relationships; and evaluation helps the Public Relations team improve the next content. If this cycle is maintained, Instagram can support not only short-term publication but also long-term image development. For Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu, this approach is important because the university competes in a digital environment where public perception is formed quickly through online information.

CONCLUSION

Public Relations of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu plays an important role in enhancing positive institutional image through the management of Instagram content. The official account @dehasen is used to publish campus information, institutional identity, student and lecturer achievements, academic activities, partnerships, accreditation, and admission information. Through the Honeycomb Model, the study shows that identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups are all reflected in the public relations practices on Instagram.

The crosscheck with student and community informants shows that Instagram content creates positive impressions among internal and external audiences. Students feel helped in accessing campus information and feel proud when campus activities are published. The public perceives the university as active, open, and reputable. Therefore, Instagram content functions as a digital public relations tool that supports the positive image of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu. The implication of this study is that the Public Relations team needs to maintain

visual consistency, publish achievement-based content regularly, respond to audience interaction, and continue evaluating the type of content that receives positive public response. These steps can help Instagram remain a credible and strategic medium for university communication.

LIMITATION

Public Relations of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu plays an important role in enhancing positive institutional image through the management of Instagram content. The official account @dehasen is used to publish campus information, institutional identity, student and lecturer achievements, academic activities, partnerships, accreditation, and admission information. Through the Honeycomb Model, the study shows that identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups are all reflected in the public relations practices on Instagram.

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