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Public Relations in University: Managing Internal Communication

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Abstract: The existence of public relations in organizations is definitely required right now. It is particularly in the era where public needs information and organizations need their existence in society. It prevails for universities as well. Almost all universities also have public relations in the structure of their organization and the role has been truly required. The success of communication depends on strong internal public relation program, and the focus on building relationship as well as conveying message. Therefore, universities should build good internal communication. In fact universities have different internal audience with profit and non profit organizations in general. In the universities, the audience consists of either lecturers and employees or mostly students classified as adolescents. In this matter, university public relations has to have its own way to carry out its communication activities. The research results give understanding and important description on public relations in universities.

Keywords : communication, internal communication, public relations

1. Introduction

The existence of public relations institution in an organization is a must. Almost all organizations have public relations in the structure of their organization. It relates to public demand right now that it requires an organization to make communication with its audience. It prevails for universities as well. Almost all universities also have public relations in the structure of their organization. More and more, the role is admitted.

The existence of public relations in universities definitely can make communication with audience easier. For this purpose, the universities need a unit of public relations that carries out the function of communication to various stakeholders.

The main attention in carrying out the function of communication is audience. Concerning audience, it can be read in form of the organizations themselves. Moreover, the organizations can be divided into two types, i.e. profit and non-profit. The profit organizations are frequently similar to cooperation, and non profit ones are called the government or organizations that carry out public policies.

Similar to organizations in general, universities also have target audience. Audience as the target directed to public relations is divided into two, i.e. internal and external. Bernays states in Mukarom and Latjana [1] that there are two audiences, i.e. internal and external. The internal audience is those who are in the organization, and the external one is people or a

group of people located outside the organizations and have interests and problems in their relationship to the organizations.

2. Discussion

Aswad Ishak states that organization whether it is small or big scale basically will always need active communication touch to allow public participation in the development of the companies' operational activities. The management of the communication activities become a must and it should be carried out by communication specialists. [2]

From the above explanation, it can be understood on the important meaning of communication for an organization. It also prevails for universities. The bigger an university, the more complex communication it should build.

Universities have specific audience if compared to other institutions and organizations. In business institutions, for example, main focus is on profit oriented. Communication to be built is adjusted in the framework of providing profit.

Bernays in Mukarom and Laksana [2] state that there are two kinds of audiences, i.e. internal and external. Internal audience is people in organizations and external audience are people or group of people outside organizations and have interest and problem in relation to the organizations.

In building reputation of an organization, it has to start from internal audience. In this matter, public relations has to build internal communication as well. It can increase the sense of ownership and proud to the organizations. In a company, those included in internal audience are the company's board of directors, shareholders, employees and their families.

In the book entitled of *School Public Relations for Student Success* written by Moore [3], Success depends on committing to a strong internal public relations program—one that focuses on building relationships as well as delivering messages. Moore who wrote book specifically about public relations at school (education institution) state that the success of communication depends on strong internal public relations programs of which focus on building relationship including in conveying messages. Universities have to build internal communication as well.

If in the companies those who become internal audience are board of directors, employees and their families, in the universities these are lecturers, students, employees and parents. It can be strengthened from Moore [3].

Successful school public relations activities at all levels should work to ensure that the communication needs of all key audiences are addressed. These obviously include parents, students, and employees but key audiences extend beyond those directly linked to schools and include all stakeholders essential to school and student success, for example, taxpayers, seniors, nonparent residents, new residents, area business executives and owners, political officials, religious leaders, social service agencies, law enforcement agencies, the news media, and more.

From the above statement, it can be written the essential point that audience of the universities includes internal and external, and the internal audience is not only lecturers but also parents, students and employees.

University internal audience has its own characteristics. For example, how the universities manage communication with their students. Students in general are adolescents with the age range of 18-22 years. If related to the current era, the age range include millennial generation with the characteristics of dominant Internet users as their communication media. [4].

The habits of students that mostly use Internets also influence public relations in its communication with them. The conventional media can become obsolete and ineffective in conveying messages. Therefore, in conveying messages to students, it should utilize new media as the consequence of current technology development. It is an issue that university public relations has to encounter.

The above example is not only about dynamics that occurs in public relations in the digital era but also becomes a specific study in managing internal communication particularly in universities. The complexity of communication can also be seen from total internal audience to be managed. For example, Airlangga University, Surabaya has more than 39,000 students totally excluding lecturers and employees totaling more than 3,500. (<http://www.unair.ac.id/site/menu/show/76/profil-universitas.html>). It is not few number. Another example is University of Indonesia that has more than 47,000 students totally. (<http://www.ui.ac.id/akademik-kemahasiswaan.html>). The data are only to show great number of the internal audience that has to be managed excluding alumnae whose number can be greater again.

Public relations has to understand the characteristics of its internal audience particularly students. Students become the biggest percentage of total internal audience in university institution. The understanding is important so that messages being conveyed can be adjusted to their condition. Students are psychologically in adolescence age, and their age range is around 18-22 years old. According to Dr. Juke Roosjati Siregar, M.Pd, students who are in the transition period of the age range are not totally able to appear their characteristics of young adult, and they frequently appear the characteristics of adolescence. [10]

The psychological description of students who are in the adolescent age range can become the basis of knowledge on how public relations should carry out communication activities. From this point it can be seen that what communication behavior students have been doing all this time. Therefore, public relations has to anticipate all possibilities to occurs for their behavior.

Nasution [5] has stated that the important function that university public relations has to do consists of two things, such as corrective function. With the function, public relations has to be able to neutralize each negative opinion that develops in internal or external society. The corrective function tries to prevent universities not to do something that can make the organizations lost. Moreover, it gives input required in making policy decision.

From the above explanation, private university public relations is able to neutralize negative opinion that develop in each audience. For internal audience, the issues that frequently occur are how to give understanding on the importance of maintaining the campus's reputation. The reputation grows from individual consciousness in the organizations.

Another obstacle that become the attention of public relations is the behavior of students social media. Most of Internet users have similar age range like students. Young generation in the age range of 20-24 years and 25-29 years has the penetration number of more than 80% Internet users in Indonesia. The findings get support from the known profession of students, i.e. those who mostly use Internet if compared to other sectors. [6]

The media social behavior of students is also fragile to make negative opinion in society. There are not few cases accused to universities that start from their social media behavior. For example, it relates to the bullying case of a senior student in Gunadarma University. The case was viral after the student himself uploaded the bullying video [7]. Moreover, it became viral on media and had negative opinion in public.

In this matter, the role of public relations becomes important in carrying out the function of communication in universities. It will give understanding on the importance of maintaining

reputation. The role of public relations is disappointingly not recognized in the university managements yet.

There are many universities that do not appoint their public relations managers in dominant coalition. The dominant coalition, according to White and Dozier, is group in organization who has authority to make decision making and push decision on objectives, tasks and functions of organizations [8]. Public relations managers entered into the dominant coalition indicate that they have role in determining the organizational policies.

In fact the position of universities public relations remains complementary or support the activities of the universities' board of direct or particularly when communicating to audience. Communication that public relations does remains as supporting. Moreover, it is not part of academic and non-academic activities that become the foundation of activities in the education institutions.

Lumbald and Steward [9] states that School community relations (school PR) is a planned process of two-way communication between a school and its publics directed toward school improvement. If it is related to university public relations, it can be meant that public relations carries out the two-way communication process planned between universities and their audience. The keyword of the above opinion is how public relations manage the two-way communication. It has another understanding but it has similar meaning stated by Prayudi [8] as boundary spanning, i.e. public relations practitioners try to communicate various interests and management policies to audience but they also try to bridge the audience' interests so as to be accepted by the management.

Through the boundary spanning approach, public relations can manage communication so that it builds the interests of two parties. Moreover, it can reduce obstacles of communication flow that usually become the causes of internal problems.

3. Conclusion

Public relations in universities has important role in supporting internal communication. However, public relations cannot carry out the role totally. Obstacles that public relations has to face come from the university management's policies itself. Moreover, internal audience of the universities are mostly students and they need their own strategy to build appropriate communication. The role of public relations gives understanding on the importance of maintaining reputation as main capital of university existence to internal audience.

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