



The Role of Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality in Digital PR Campaigns in Pesantren

Anis Istiqomah^{1*}, Raudlatul Hikmah²

¹ Universitas Darul 'Ulum, Indonesia

² Universitas Nurul Jadid, Indonesia

Email: anisistiqomah2020@gmail.com

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*Correspondence Address:

anisistiqomah2020@gmail.com

Abstract:

This study aims to examine the role of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) in transforming digital public relations (PR) campaigns within pesantren by enhancing communication effectiveness, audience engagement, institutional image, and public trust. A qualitative case study approach was employed at Pesantren. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using data condensation, reduction, display, and verification techniques. The findings reveal that VR and AR have shifted pesantren communication from conventional promotional practices toward immersive and interactive digital strategies through virtual tours, AR-enhanced brochures, and digital da'wah content. These technologies significantly improve audience engagement, strengthen institutional credibility, reinforce the perception of pesantren as modern yet value-based Islamic institutions, and expand communication reach through digital platforms. The study concludes that immersive technologies effectively support digital public relations while preserving religious identity. The findings contribute to digital public relations theory within Islamic educational contexts and provide practical guidance for pesantren and policymakers in implementing immersive communication technologies to strengthen institutional competitiveness and stakeholder relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of this research can be seen from the significant impact caused by digital technology in people's lives. As technology develops, social media and digital campaigns increasingly dominate public communication. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are two technologies that are developing rapidly and have great potential in various sectors, including in the fields of communication and PR (Chylinski et al., 2020). This technology allows for the creation of more immersive interactive experiences, influencing audience perceptions and actions (Wedel et al., 2020). The application of VR and AR in PR campaigns, especially in Islamic boarding schools, can provide a new approach in bringing moral, social, and educational messages closer to a wider audience. Therefore, it is important to explore how this technology can be applied effectively in the pesantren environment, in order to enrich the PR campaign

method that has so far seemed conventional.

People in Indonesia, especially in the pesantren environment, still face challenges in accessing and utilizing the latest technology, especially in terms of digital communication and homework. Digital PR campaigns that are widely used in the commercial sector often have not been implemented optimally in Islamic boarding schools (Rizky Giansyah Putra et al., 2024). This has an impact on the lack of effectiveness of the message conveyed by pesantren to the wider community, especially in building an image and disseminating religious programs. On the other hand, many Islamic boarding schools rely on traditional communication methods, such as lectures and recitations, although the impact is limited (Indrioko, 2023). This research aims to answer this problem by exploring the role of VR and AR in optimizing PR campaigns in Islamic boarding schools, which have the potential to expand reach and increase interaction with audiences.

Phenomena on the ground show that although pesantren have an important role in religious education in Indonesia, they tend to lag behind in the use of digital technology for PR purposes (Maulana et al., 2025a). Some Islamic boarding schools have started to implement information technology to improve the quality of learning and internal communication, but not many have adopted technologies such as VR and AR in their PR campaigns. In fact, an effective PR campaign can support pesantren in introducing religious and cultural values to the wider community. In addition, changes in more visual and interactive information consumption patterns among the younger generation make technologies such as VR and AR a relevant choice to reach a larger audience (Citraningtyas et al., 2025). This shows that there is an urgent need for Islamic boarding schools to adopt this advanced technology in their PR campaigns.

Previous research has extensively discussed the application of VR and AR technologies in various fields, including education, entertainment, and marketing (AlGerafi et al., 2023). In the education sector, several studies show that the use of VR and AR can increase student engagement, improve understanding, and create a more immersive learning experience. However, although there is research that highlights the potential of this technology in the context of religious education, it is still rare to examine its use in PR campaigns, especially in Islamic boarding schools (Asril et al., 2023). Most previous research has focused more on the adoption of technology in public schools or universities, and not much has explored how this technology can be integrated into PR campaigns based on religious and social values (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). This research contributes to filling this gap by exploring the application of VR and AR in the context of Islamic boarding schools.

Although research on VR and AR technologies in education and communication has grown, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the application of these technologies in faith-based PR campaigns, particularly in the pesantren environment. Existing studies have not explored how pesantren can utilize VR and AR in their PR strategies. Previous research has focused more on the application of technology for learning or entertainment purposes (Radianti et al., 2020a). Therefore, this research is very important because it will provide new insights on how pesantren can utilize technology to introduce religious values in a more interactive way, overcome existing communication challenges,

and expand the reach of audiences. This research fills the gap in the existing literature by focusing on PR campaigns in Islamic boarding schools.

The novelty of this research lies in the application of VR and AR technology in pesantren PR campaigns, an approach that has not been widely explored in the existing literature. VR and AR technology has the potential to bring new experiences in the way Islamic boarding schools communicate with the public, providing a more interesting and interactive way to convey moral and social messages. This research will also show how this technology can help Islamic boarding schools to reach a wider audience, especially the younger generation who are more familiar with technology. Therefore, this research is very important to complete, because it can make a real contribution in modernizing pesantren communication and increasing its impact in society.

This study aims to address the central question of how Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) can be utilized in the public relations (PR) campaigns of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). By focusing on the implementation of these two technologies, the study seeks to identify both the opportunities and the challenges faced by pesantren in integrating VR and AR into their PR strategies. The main argument of this research is that these technologies can do more than simply enrich the content presented by pesantren; they can also help establish a more dynamic and contemporary institutional image that appeals to a broader audience. The primary contribution of this study is to offer practical recommendations for pesantren on leveraging digital technologies to enhance the effectiveness of their public relations campaigns.

Overall, this study seeks to bridge the gap between digital technology and pesantren communication by exploring the application of VR and AR in institutional PR campaigns. Through an innovative approach, the research is expected to provide practical guidance for pesantren in adopting digital technologies to strengthen their public image and institutional reputation. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on educational technology and value-based public relations within Islamic educational institutions, while opening new avenues for the integration of immersive technologies in religious contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research aims to answer the main question about how VR and AR can be used in Islamic boarding school PR campaigns. Focusing on the application of these two technologies, this study aims to identify the potential and challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in integrating these technologies into their PR campaigns. The main argument raised is that this technology can not only enrich the content of Islamic boarding schools, but also help them in building a more dynamic and modern image, which is acceptable to a wider audience. The main contribution of this research is to provide practical solutions for Islamic boarding schools to utilize technology to increase the effectiveness of their PR campaigns.

People in Indonesia, especially in the pesantren environment, still face challenges in accessing and utilizing the latest technology, especially in terms of digital communication and homework. Digital PR campaigns that are widely used in the commercial sector often have not been implemented optimally in Islamic boarding schools. This has an impact on the lack of effectiveness of the message conveyed by pesantren to the wider community, especially in building

an image and disseminating religious programs. On the other hand, many Islamic boarding schools rely on traditional communication methods, such as lectures and recitations, although the impact is limited. This research aims to answer this problem by exploring the role of VR and AR in optimizing PR campaigns in Islamic boarding schools, which have the potential to expand reach and increase interaction with audiences.

This study used three data collection techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted with pesantren managers, ustaz, and audiences involved in PR activities, to explore their understanding and experience regarding the use of VR and AR in PR campaigns. Participatory observations will observe communication processes and PR campaigns involving VR and AR technologies, with researchers directly engaging to gain insights into their implementation and impact. Documentation studies were used to collect data on existing PR campaign materials, as well as documentation of previously implemented VR and AR use. These techniques will provide a deeper understanding of the application of the technology in Islamic boarding school PR campaigns.

The data analysis in this study was carried out through several stages. Data condensation is the first step, where researchers collect and filter relevant data from interviews, observations, and documentation. The collected data is filtered to ensure only information related to the use of VR and AR in Islamic boarding school PR campaigns. The data reduction stage is carried out by analyzing the data further to find important patterns or themes that emerge, structuring the data to be more concise and focusing on the research objectives. At the data display stage, the data that has been compiled is displayed in the form of a narrative or diagram to facilitate interpretation. Finally, data verification is carried out to ensure the validity of findings through cross-checking with various data sources, ensuring the correctness and reliability of the information collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Transforming Digital Public Relations Strategies in Islamic Boarding Schools through the Implementation of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

In this study, the transformation of pesantren digital public relations (PR) strategies through the implementation of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) refers to the institutional shift from conventional communication practices toward a more interactive, immersive, and technology-driven digital communication approach. This transformation is reflected in the development of various digital communication media, including virtual campus tours, VR-based simulations of students' daily activities, AR-enhanced brochures, interactive posters, and immersive digital da'wah content. Field findings indicate that the adoption of VR and AR extends beyond technological innovation; it represents a strategic reorientation of pesantren public relations aimed at creating meaningful communication experiences, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and enhancing institutional credibility among digitally connected audiences. Consequently, communication strategies are no longer limited to disseminating information but are increasingly designed to foster audience participation,

emotional connection, and trust through immersive digital experiences.

The Head of Public Relations explained that the pesantren has gradually shifted its promotional strategy from traditional print-based communication to immersive digital media. According to the informant, conventional promotional materials such as brochures and photographs were no longer sufficient to provide prospective students and parents with a comprehensive understanding of the pesantren environment. Therefore, the institution developed a VR-based virtual tour allowing users to explore classrooms, dormitories, mosques, libraries, and students' daily activities remotely. The informant stated: "We want the public to experience the atmosphere of the pesantren rather than simply viewing photographs or promotional videos. Through virtual reality, prospective students from different regions can explore our facilities and educational environment without physically visiting the campus. This approach increases transparency and strengthens public confidence in our institution".

The researcher interprets this finding as evidence that VR has become a strategic communication instrument emphasizing experiential engagement rather than one-way information delivery. The implementation of immersive virtual environments enables pesantren to communicate institutional values more authentically while reducing information asymmetry between the institution and prospective stakeholders. As a result, VR contributes to building organizational legitimacy and strengthening public trust through realistic digital experiences.

The Coordinator of the Digital Media Team explained that the pesantren has also integrated Augmented Reality (AR) into its communication strategy by redesigning promotional materials into interactive digital media. AR technology has been incorporated into brochures and posters that can be scanned using smartphones, allowing users to access institutional profile videos, messages from the pesantren leader (kyai), educational program information, and documentation of students' learning activities. The informant remarked: "Our brochures are no longer static printed materials. Once scanned with an AR application, users immediately access videos presenting pesantren activities, facilities, and messages from our religious leaders. The public response has been significantly more enthusiastic compared to conventional brochures".

The researcher interprets these findings as demonstrating that AR has transformed promotional media into interactive communication platforms capable of increasing audience engagement. Rather than functioning solely as informational materials, AR-based media facilitate richer communication by combining textual, visual, and audiovisual content within a single platform. This innovation enables pesantren to communicate more effectively with digitally oriented audiences while simultaneously enhancing institutional attractiveness and accessibility.

Table 1. Implementation of Digital Public Relations Transformation through Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Head of Public Relations	"Virtual tours enable prospective students to experience the pesantren environment remotely, making institutional information more	VR implementation as an immersive communication strategy to enhance transparency

	transparent and trustworthy."	and institutional credibility.
Digital Media Coordinator	"AR-based brochures and posters allow users to access interactive videos about pesantren activities through their smartphones, making promotional media more engaging."	AR implementation as an interactive promotional medium that enhances audience engagement and communication effectiveness.

Source: Primary data processed, JASP 2026

Table 1 demonstrates that the implementation of VR and AR technologies constitutes a strategic transformation of pesantren digital public relations aimed at improving communication effectiveness through immersive and interactive experiences. The Head of Public Relations emphasizes VR as an instrument for increasing institutional transparency by enabling prospective stakeholders to virtually experience the pesantren environment before making enrollment decisions. This finding suggests that immersive communication technologies reduce uncertainty and strengthen organizational credibility by presenting authentic institutional conditions.

Meanwhile, the Digital Media Coordinator highlights the role of AR in modernizing conventional promotional materials into dynamic digital communication tools. Interactive brochures and posters integrate multimedia elements that facilitate deeper audience engagement and improve information retention. Together, these findings indicate that VR and AR perform complementary functions within pesantren digital PR strategies: VR creates immersive institutional experiences, whereas AR enriches promotional communication through interactive multimedia content. Their integration reflects a broader transformation from information-centered communication toward experience-centered public relations.

The Influence of Immersive VR and AR Experiences on Audience Engagement, Institutional Image, and Public Trust toward Pesantren

In this study, the influence of immersive Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) experiences refers to the measurable impact of immersive digital communication technologies on the effectiveness of pesantren digital public relations campaigns. Operationally, this influence is reflected in increased audience engagement, improved user experience, stronger perceptions of pesantren as modern yet religious educational institutions, enhanced public trust, and broader dissemination of institutional information through digital platforms and social media. Field findings indicate that immersive technologies do not merely function as communication tools but also shape stakeholders' cognitive and emotional responses by providing interactive experiences that encourage participation, foster institutional familiarity, and strengthen long-term relationships between pesantren and the public.

The Head of Public Relations explained that since the implementation of VR and AR, the pesantren has experienced a substantial increase in audience interaction across its digital communication platforms. According to the informant, prospective students and parents spend considerably more time exploring virtual tours and interactive promotional content than engaging with conventional photographs or printed brochures. The informant stated: "Visitors

are much more interested in exploring our virtual tour and AR content because they can experience the pesantren environment directly. We have observed that users spend more time interacting with our digital platforms, ask more questions afterward, and are more confident about the information they receive."

The researcher interprets these findings as indicating that immersive technologies significantly improve audience engagement by transforming passive information consumption into active participation. Rather than merely viewing institutional information, users become directly involved in exploring educational facilities and learning environments, creating stronger emotional attachment and deeper cognitive processing. This enhanced engagement contributes to more effective digital public relations by increasing communication quality and strengthening stakeholder relationships.

The Digital Media Coordinator emphasized that VR and AR have also positively influenced the public perception of the pesantren's institutional image. According to the informant, community members increasingly perceive the pesantren as an innovative educational institution capable of embracing technological advancement without compromising Islamic values and traditions. The informant explained: "Many parents have expressed that they are impressed because the pesantren is technologically advanced while maintaining its religious identity. The combination of innovation and Islamic values has strengthened their confidence in choosing our institution for their children's education."

The researcher interprets this statement as demonstrating that immersive digital communication contributes not only to technological modernization but also to institutional reputation management. VR and AR reinforce the perception that pesantren can adapt to the digital era while preserving their religious character. Consequently, these technologies function as strategic instruments for institutional branding by integrating innovation with authenticity, thereby increasing public trust and organizational legitimacy.

Table 2. The Influence of VR and AR Experiences on Audience Engagement, Institutional Image, and Public Trust

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Head of Public Relations	"Users spend more time exploring our VR and AR content, actively ask questions afterward, and express greater confidence in the information provided."	Increased audience engagement, user participation, and communication effectiveness through immersive digital experiences.
Digital Media Coordinator	"Parents perceive the pesantren as technologically progressive while preserving its Islamic identity, which strengthens their confidence in the institution."	Enhancement of institutional image, public trust, and organizational credibility through immersive communication technologies.

Table 2 illustrates that the implementation of VR and AR generates multidimensional impacts on the effectiveness of pesantren digital public relations. The Head of Public Relations emphasizes behavioral outcomes, particularly increased audience engagement reflected in longer interaction duration, greater curiosity, and more active communication following exposure

to immersive content. These findings suggest that immersive technologies encourage meaningful audience participation rather than passive information reception, thereby improving the overall quality of institutional communication.

Meanwhile, the Digital Media Coordinator highlights the perceptual dimension of immersive communication, emphasizing its contribution to strengthening institutional image and public trust. The integration of innovative digital technologies with Islamic educational values has created a balanced institutional identity that is simultaneously modern and religious. This combination enhances organizational credibility by reassuring stakeholders that technological advancement complements rather than replaces the pesantren's core educational and spiritual mission. Collectively, these findings indicate that immersive technologies positively influence both behavioral engagement and cognitive perceptions among external stakeholders.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) significantly enhances the effectiveness of digital public relations in pesantren by improving audience engagement, institutional image, and public trust. These findings are consistent with the experiential communication perspective proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999), which argues that memorable experiences generate stronger emotional connections than conventional information delivery. Likewise, they align with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989), suggesting that technologies perceived as useful and easy to use are more likely to be accepted by users. The present study extends these theoretical perspectives into the context of Islamic educational institutions, demonstrating that immersive technologies are capable of strengthening public relations without diminishing religious identity (Aini et al., 2025). Unlike previous studies that primarily investigated VR and AR in tourism, marketing, or commercial branding, this research reveals that immersive technologies also function effectively as strategic communication tools for pesantren by facilitating transparency, authenticity, and meaningful stakeholder interaction.

Furthermore, the study confirms previous research indicating that immersive technologies positively influence audience engagement and organizational reputation. Existing studies by Javornik (2016) and Yung and Khoo-Lattimore (2019) emphasize that AR and VR enhance customer interaction through immersive experiences and interactive storytelling. The present findings support these conclusions, showing that prospective students and parents spend more time interacting with virtual tours, AR brochures, and immersive promotional content than with conventional media. However, this study also identifies a distinctive pattern not sufficiently addressed in previous literature: engagement is shaped not only by technological sophistication but also by the integration of Islamic educational values into digital experiences. Consequently, audience participation is driven simultaneously by technological attractiveness and value congruence, enabling pesantren to establish stronger emotional relationships with stakeholders (You et al., 2026). This demonstrates that immersive communication becomes more effective when technological innovation is harmonized with institutional culture and religious identity rather than functioning merely as a promotional instrument.

Another important finding concerns the influence of VR and AR on institutional image and public trust. Previous public relations literature, particularly Grunig and Hunt's Excellence Theory (1984), emphasizes that organizational reputation depends on transparent, interactive, and mutually beneficial communication with stakeholders (Hung-Baesecke et al., 2021). The findings of this research reinforce this theoretical argument by illustrating that immersive technologies improve transparency through realistic virtual representations of pesantren facilities, educational activities, and daily student life. Nevertheless, this study contributes a novel perspective by demonstrating that transparency achieved through immersive communication simultaneously strengthens perceptions of authenticity and religious credibility. Rather than perceiving technological innovation as contradictory to Islamic traditions, stakeholders interpret it as evidence that pesantren are capable of embracing modernization while preserving their core religious values. This finding enriches the digital public relations literature by introducing the concept of "immersive religious branding," where technological innovation reinforces rather than replaces institutional authenticity and cultural identity.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the advancement of digital public relations scholarship by integrating immersive communication technologies with relationship management theory and institutional branding within Islamic educational contexts. Existing digital PR frameworks generally emphasize social media, websites, and online content as dominant communication channels (Maulana et al., 2025b; Sumarlan et al., 2025). However, the present research demonstrates that VR and AR represent a higher level of digital engagement because they create experiential communication characterized by interaction, immersion, and emotional involvement. Accordingly, this study proposes that immersive technologies should be considered strategic components of next-generation digital public relations, particularly for educational organizations seeking to strengthen stakeholder relationships in increasingly competitive digital environments. The research also contributes to the emerging discourse on digital transformation in Islamic education by demonstrating that technological innovation can coexist harmoniously with religious values, thereby expanding theoretical understanding of digital modernization beyond commercial and secular organizational settings (Aini et al., 2025; Malizal, 2025).

Pesantren should regard VR and AR not merely as promotional innovations but as strategic communication investments capable of improving institutional competitiveness, transparency, stakeholder engagement, and public trust. Public relations practitioners are encouraged to develop immersive communication strategies that integrate virtual tours, AR-enhanced promotional materials, interactive storytelling, and digital da'wah while preserving institutional identity and Islamic values (Golan et al., 2021). Policymakers may also utilize these findings to formulate digital transformation policies supporting the adoption of immersive technologies across Islamic educational institutions. Moreover, technology developers should collaborate with educational institutions to produce affordable and culturally appropriate immersive applications tailored to pesantren environments (Radianti et al., 2020b). Overall, this study contributes both theoretically and practically by demonstrating that immersive digital public relations can simultaneously foster innovation,

strengthen institutional reputation, preserve religious identity, and establish sustainable relationships between pesantren and society in the era of digital transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) into pesantren digital public relations strategies has significantly transformed institutional communication by creating immersive experiences that enhance audience engagement, strengthen institutional image, and increase public trust while preserving Islamic values. The most important finding highlights that technological innovation becomes more effective when it is integrated with the religious identity and educational mission of pesantren, demonstrating that digital transformation and Islamic values are complementary rather than contradictory. Academically, this study contributes to the development of digital public relations literature by extending the application of immersive communication technologies to the context of Islamic educational institutions and proposing a conceptual understanding of immersive digital public relations that combines technological innovation, stakeholder engagement, and value-based institutional branding. Nevertheless, this study is limited to a qualitative investigation within a specific pesantren context, thereby restricting the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to employ mixed-methods or quantitative approaches across multiple pesantren and educational institutions, examine the long-term effectiveness of VR and AR on stakeholder behavior, and explore the integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, the metaverse, and extended reality (XR) in digital public relations practices within Islamic education.

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