

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA
IN ENHANCING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST:
A STUDY ON ISLAMIC PUBLIC RELATIONS AT BAZNAS
NORTH SUMATRA**

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Received: 2025-05-28; Accepted: 2025-06-05; Published: 2025-06-30

Abstract : This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of social media in enhancing public engagement and trust toward the National Zakat Board (BAZNAS) of North Sumatra, particularly within the context of Islamic public relations. In today's digital era, social media serves as a strategic medium for delivering information rapidly, transparently, and broadly to the public. As a zakat management institution, BAZNAS bears the responsibility of building public trust through effective communication grounded in Islamic values. Through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and its official website, BAZNAS North Sumatra utilizes informative, interactive, and persuasive content to encourage public participation and strengthen institutional credibility. This research adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and content analysis of BAZNAS North Sumatra's social media channels. The findings indicate that the digital communication strategy employed by BAZNAS has been relatively successful in fostering positive relationships with its audience. Public engagement is reflected in the high level of interaction on Instagram and TikTok, while the website functions as an information hub that reinforces transparency. Key factors influencing the effectiveness of BAZNAS's digital communication include the transparent presentation of information through infographics and fund distribution reports, prompt responsiveness to public inquiries, and active collaboration with religious figures and influencers. These elements have directly contributed to increased public trust in the institution. This study recommends improving content consistency, strengthening collaborative strategies, and optimizing interactive website features as strategic steps for advancing sustainable Islamic public relations through social media.

Keywords: Social Media, Engagement, Public Trust, Islamic Public Relations, BAZNAS North Sumatra

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47453/>

Introduction

In the digital era, the use of social media has become a primary strategy in building public communication, including within the scope of Islamic public relations. BAZNAS North Sumatra, as a zakat management institution, plays a crucial role in disseminating information about zakat, infaq, and sadaqah (ZIS) to the wider community. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and the official website serve as key tools in promoting transparency, strengthening public trust, and encouraging public participation in socio-religious activities.

According to Law No. 23 of 2011 on Zakat Management, Article 3 states that the objectives of zakat management are to: enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of zakat services, and to increase the benefits of zakat in achieving community welfare and poverty alleviation (Law No. 23/2011). Furthermore, Law No. 14 of 2008 on Public Information Disclosure, Article 7 Paragraph (1), stipulates that public bodies including zakat management institutions are obliged to provide accessible and transparent information to the public (Law No. 14/2008). This underscores the importance of social media as a tool for delivering transparent information, enabling the public to understand how zakat funds are managed and distributed.

The use of social media in Islamic public relations also plays a crucial role in disseminating Islamic values and increasing public participation in philanthropic activities. According to Nasrullah (2020) in his book *Social Media: Perspectives on Communication, Culture, and Sociotechnology*, social media holds a significant role in fostering engagement and interaction between institutions and their audiences. Public trust in Islamic philanthropic organizations such as BAZNAS is strongly influenced by information transparency, prompt responsiveness, and active audience involvement in online discussions (Nasrullah, 2020).

In the context of Islamic public relations, a study by Aisyah and Rachmat (2022) published in the *Journal of Islamic Communication* highlights the significant potential of social media in building a positive image of Islamic philanthropic institutions. Their findings suggest that digital communication strategies employed by zakat organizations should incorporate educational, interactive, and persuasive content to enhance public participation (Aisyah & Rachmat, 2022).

However, the effectiveness of social media in fostering engagement and increasing public trust in BAZNAS North Sumatra still requires further investigation. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the extent to which BAZNAS North Sumatra's social media platforms function effectively in fulfilling the role of Islamic public relations, with a specific focus on Instagram, TikTok, and the official website as the primary platforms utilized.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. BAZNAS North Sumatra was selected as the subject to explore the use of social media within the framework of Islamic public relations. As the research focuses solely on BAZNAS North Sumatra, which serves as a representative of a religious organization in its digital communication practices, the emphasis is placed on the institution's experiences, perceptions, and communication strategies in digital platforms. This method is grounded in the case study framework proposed by Yin (2018), which highlights the importance of understanding context when examining social phenomena.

This research was conducted at the BAZNAS North Sumatra office and through observations of its official social media accounts, including Instagram, TikTok, and the official website. The study involved two main subject groups. The first group consisted of BAZNAS North Sumatra's social media managers, who were interviewed to understand the digital communication strategies employed. The second group included users or followers of BAZNAS's social media platforms, selected to explore their perceptions of the information shared and their level of trust in the institution.

The data collection techniques used in this study included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document or social media content analysis. Interviews were conducted with social media managers to explore their digital communication strategies, as well as with followers to understand their views on the credibility and effectiveness of BAZNAS's communication. Participant observation involved directly observing the management of social media accounts, the types of content shared, and the patterns of interaction with the audience. In addition, the researcher analyzed engagement features such as the number of likes, comments, shares, and direct messages to assess audience involvement. Document analysis was carried out by reviewing social media posts over a specific period to identify communication patterns and evaluate the effectiveness of the messages conveyed.

The data collected were then analyzed using a digital interaction analysis technique grounded in a qualitative approach. This analysis focused on the interactions between BAZNAS North Sumatra and its audience, including responses to comments or questions posed by the public. In this process, the researcher evaluated how the implemented communication strategies contributed to building trust and audience engagement.

The instruments used in this study included interview guides for the public relations officers and social media followers of BAZNAS North Sumatra, as well as social media post data, which were analyzed to identify communication patterns and the level of engagement formed between the institution and its followers on digital platforms.

Results and Discussion

Strategic Digital Communication of BAZNAS North Sumatra through Social Media

BAZNAS North Sumatra's digital communication strategy appears to align with the core principles of Islamic public relations theory, such as *siddiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (transparency in conveying messages), and *fathanah* (wisdom/intelligence). This alignment is reflected in their efforts to deliver informative content, including regular publications of ZIS fund distribution reports, infographics, and Islamic educational articles.

This approach is in line with the views of Hybels & Weaver (2001) and Alwi Dahlan (2009), who assert that Islamic public relations is not merely a form of communication, but also a form of *dakwah* (Islamic outreach) that upholds ethics and transparency.

In addition, BAZNAS North Sumatra also relies on emotional communication, such as the use of storytelling in *da'wah* videos and beneficiary testimonials, which appeal to the public's empathy. This strategy aligns with the emotional approach discussed by Nurhanifah et al. (2024), which emphasizes that emotional connections in digital content help strengthen audience loyalty toward the institution.

In building the institution’s image and conveying the values of da’wah as well as transparency in zakat management, BAZNAS North Sumatra also adopts the principles of cyber public relations. In line with the findings of Nurhanifah et al. (2023), digital public relations becomes effective when social media is utilized creatively to shape the institution’s image in the public eye.

Berdasarkan hasil wawancara dengan pengelola media sosial BAZNAS Sumut, strategi komunikasi digital mereka mengacu pada prinsip informatif, interaktif, dan persuasif. Beberapa strategi utama yang diterapkan meliputi:

Educational and Informative Content

BAZNAS North Sumatra regularly disseminates information related to the distribution programs of zakat, infaq, and sadaqah (ZIS).



Figure 1 : Screenshot of an Instagram Reel from @baznasprovsumut featuring a collaborative event with the North Sumatra Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI Sumut) on zakat management socialization for Islamic scholars and preachers (ulama and mubaligh/mubalighah).

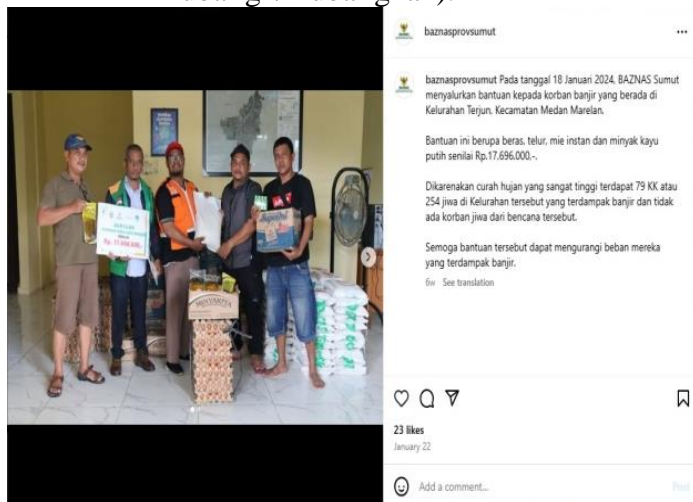
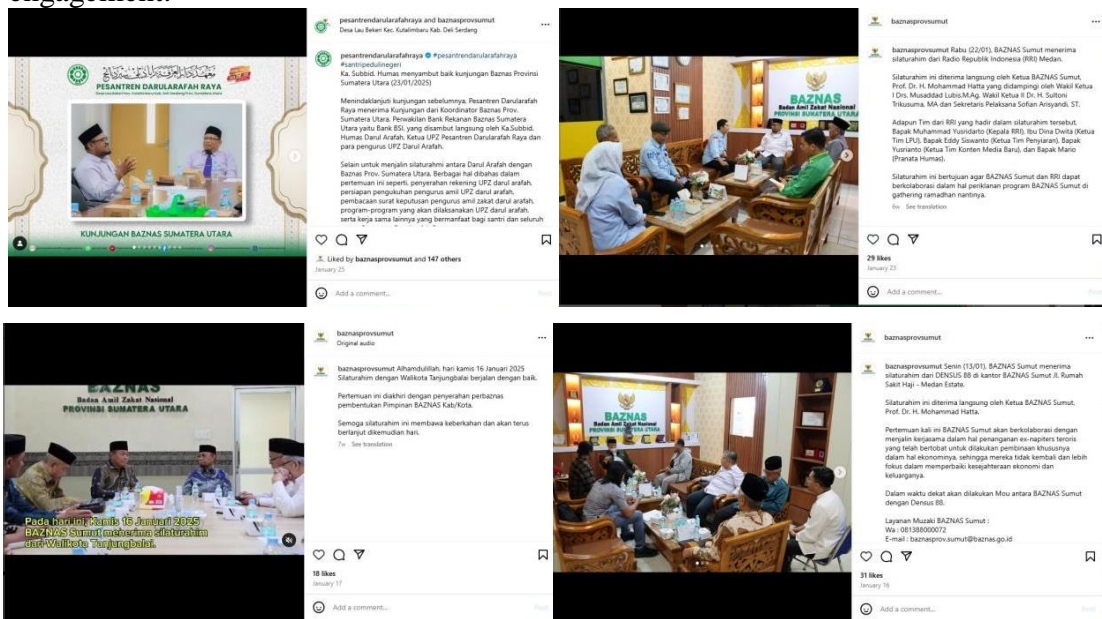


Figure 2 : Instagram post by @baznasprovsumut showing the distribution of zakat-based humanitarian aid to flood victims in Medan Marelan.

Infographics, Islamic educational articles, and financial transparency reports are published through the official website of BAZNAS North Sumatra. Information on the virtues of zakat in Islam is also shared via Instagram Reels and TikTok as part of the organization's public education efforts.

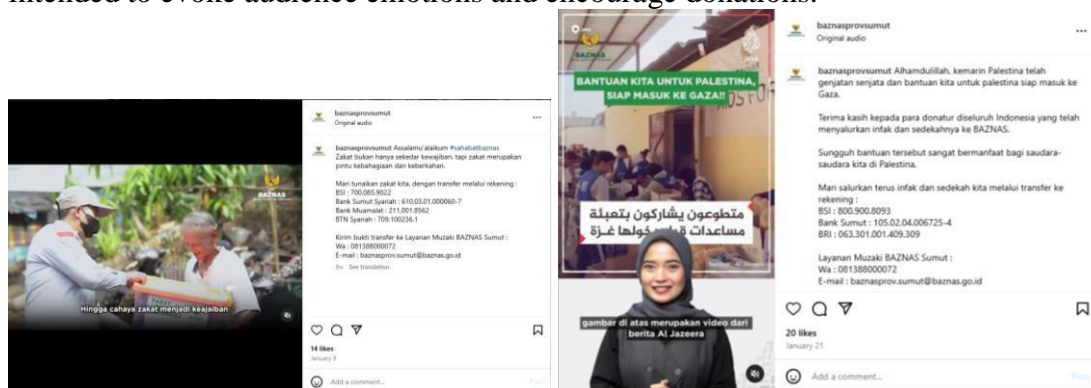
Interactive Content

The use of features such as polls, Q&A, and live streaming on Instagram serves to facilitate interaction with the audience. TikTok Live is utilized for real-time discussions with religious figures and for conducting live fundraising activities. Organizing discussions with religious leaders and academics to strengthen public engagement.



Persuasive Content

The use of storytelling to convey the narratives of zakat beneficiaries is intended to evoke audience emotions and encourage donations.



The use of appealing visuals and clear calls-to-action (CTAs) in each postsuch as “Donate Now” or “Let’s Share Together” serves to prompt audience participation. Digital interaction analysis indicates that posts with interactive and persuasive elements tend to generate higher engagement compared to purely informative content.

Engagement Levels on Instagram, TikTok, and the Official Website of BAZNAS North Sumatra

Just as Starbucks has leveraged social media to boost engagement by creating content relevant to younger audiences, BAZNAS North Sumatra has also maximized the use of digital platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to reach millennial audiences. This strategy highlights the strategic role of social media in fostering digital engagement, as emphasized by Nurhanifah et al. (2022). By understanding the information consumption patterns of younger generations, BAZNAS North Sumatra has been able to design a digital communication strategy aligned with the preferences and characteristics of its audience.

One of the main approaches adopted is the provision of educational content aimed at increasing public awareness about the benefits and mechanisms of participating in zakat empowerment programs. This content includes information on zakat, infaq, and other socio-religious activities that are part of BAZNAS's Islamic public relations mission. The presentation of such educational content reflects a strategic communication practice that not only disseminates information but also builds trust and relationships between the institution and the public.

Based on observations and content analysis of BAZNAS North Sumatra's social media, audience engagement patterns vary by platform. On Instagram, the highest engagement levels were observed in Reels and Stories, especially when content focused on educating users about zakat and infaq. TikTok, on the other hand, proved more effective in capturing the attention of younger audiences through storytelling videos that showcased the tangible impact of zakat distribution. Meanwhile, the official BAZNAS website serves more as an institutional information hub, with comparatively lower levels of direct interaction.

Referring to the engagement model developed by Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), BAZNAS North Sumatra's digital engagement can be categorized into three main areas: (1) information, (2) community, and (3) action. In the information category, BAZNAS disseminates educational content via its website and Instagram Stories. The community category is demonstrated through active interaction using features such as Instagram Live, TikTok Live, and response to public comments. In the action category, BAZNAS encourages public participation through donation calls supported by clear calls-to-action (CTA), especially in TikTok and Instagram content.

Overall, Instagram and TikTok have proven to be the most effective platforms in increasing public engagement with BAZNAS North Sumatra's programs. These findings align with the theory of Van Doorn et al. (2010), which argues that engagement is not merely passive interaction, but also involves active participation such as commenting, liking, and sharing content. Real-time content, such as Instagram Reels and TikTok Live, is highly favored due to its emotional appeal and ability to display the real impact of zakat programs, thereby strengthening the emotional connection between the audience and the institution. This also aligns with the view of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), who highlight that social media is participatory, interactive, and fosters strong social connections between institutions and their publics.

Public Trust in BAZNAS Sumut's Social Media

The transparency of information disseminated by BAZNAS North Sumatra through infographics and reports on zakat fund distribution via its website and social

media platforms reflects the application of transparency principles in its communication strategy. This transparency not only demonstrates the institution's accountability but also strengthens its relationship with the public as the primary stakeholder. This finding is consistent with Ainun Jannah et al. (2024), who argue that effective public relations (PR) strategies must ensure open and responsive communication to foster public trust.

Although BAZNAS is not a commercial institution, it has strategically engaged religious leaders and public figures as communicators to deliver both da'wah messages and zakat distribution information. The use of influencers has proven to be an effective strategy for enhancing the institution's credibility, particularly among younger social media users. This strategy aligns with the concept of influencer marketing in PR, as described by Nurhanifah et al. (2023), which emphasizes building sustainable relationships, creating a positive institutional image, and influencing public perceptions strategically.

Interviews with BAZNAS Sumut social media audiences revealed several key factors that influence public trust in the institution. The first factor is information transparency. The BAZNAS website is perceived as a reliable source due to its comprehensive and detailed reporting on zakat distribution. Moreover, the use of infographics on Instagram and TikTok simplifies complex financial data, making it more accessible to the general public. The second factor is responsiveness and interaction. BAZNAS Sumut's social media managers are regarded as relatively active in responding to comments and direct messages, particularly on Instagram and TikTok. However, there were complaints that responses through the website remain relatively slow compared to other platforms.

The third factor is the support from religious leaders and Muslim influencers. Collaborations conducted via platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Live where religious figures (ustadz or ustadzah) directly explain the importance of zakat and sadaqah serve as a key factor in fostering public trust. These figures are perceived to communicate messages in a language that is relatable and easily understood by younger audiences.

Public trust in BAZNAS Sumut can be analyzed using Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment-Trust Theory, which posits that public trust is formed through three key aspects: credibility, transparency, and responsiveness. Credibility is established through the provision of accurate and verifiable information on the official website. Transparency is demonstrated via financial reports and testimonials from zakat recipients shared on social media. Meanwhile, responsiveness is reflected in the institution's active digital interaction, especially on Instagram and TikTok, which helps foster emotional closeness between the institution and its audience.

Challenges in the Utilization of Social Media by BAZNAS North Sumatra

One of the primary challenges faced by BAZNAS North Sumatra in managing its social media platforms is maintaining visual and message consistency across all digital channels. This consistency is crucial in reinforcing the organization's image in the minds of the audience and ensuring the credibility of the da'wah messages being delivered. This is supported by Nurhanifah et al. (2024), who assert that the alignment of visual identity and communication messages enhances public trust in institutions, particularly within the context of Islamic public relations.

Amidst efforts to disseminate educational information about zakat through platforms such as TikTok and the official website, BAZNAS North Sumatra also confronts another challenge namely, the spread of misinformation and inaccurate content regarding zakat on social media. Such misleading information has the potential to distort public understanding and undermine trust in zakat management institutions. Therefore, it is imperative for BAZNAS to continuously engage in clarification and digital education to counteract misinformation and promote accurate knowledge.

Findings from interviews and observations indicate that although BAZNAS North Sumatra's social media strategy has been relatively effective in advancing Islamic public relations, several issues still need to be addressed. First, there is a lack of consistency in content creation, particularly on the TikTok platform. Some respondents noted that TikTok uploads are not as frequent as those on Instagram, which reduces potential audience engagement. As a solution, it is recommended that BAZNAS develop a more structured and consistent content calendar to ensure a steady posting schedule aligned with relevant socio-religious moments.

Second, limited human resources remain a significant obstacle. The BAZNAS North Sumatra social media team consists of a small number of personnel, which hinders optimal management of all platforms. To overcome this, a collaborative strategy involving digital volunteers or students with an interest in Islamic communication could serve as an effective alternative. Such collaboration would enhance content development and audience interaction across digital channels.

Third, optimizing the functionality of the official website remains a key area for improvement. The website is considered less interactive compared to social media platforms, which leads audiences to prefer accessing information via Instagram or TikTok. To enhance the effectiveness of the website as an official information hub, interactive features such as discussion forums, chatbots, or Q&A spaces should be incorporated. These enhancements would increase user engagement and provide a more dynamic and participatory digital experience.

Implications and Conclusion

Based on the analysis conducted, this study presents several important implications for social media management in the context of Islamic public relations, particularly within the framework of BAZNAS North Sumatra. One of the key findings highlights the need to enhance audience engagement on the TikTok platform. To achieve this, BAZNAS Sumut is advised to produce more storytelling-based content that showcases real-life experiences of zakat beneficiaries. This approach has proven effective in fostering emotional closeness with the audience and promoting more meaningful digital interactions.

In addition, transparency strategies through the official website are critical to building public trust. The presentation of zakat fund distribution reports, which are currently delivered in textual formats, could be further developed into more engaging visual formats such as videos and infographics. These formats are generally more accessible and appealing to the wider public, thereby improving information readability and reinforcing positive perceptions of institutional accountability.

Another standout strategy in BAZNAS Sumut's public relations practice is collaboration with religious figures and Muslim influencers, particularly on the TikTok platform. This strategy has been shown to effectively broaden the reach of da'wah messages while also enhancing the institution's communication credibility.

These findings are consistent with the view of Ainun Jannah et al. (2024), who assert that partnerships with influencers constitute one of the most effective modern PR strategies in strengthening engagement and building public trust.

Overall, the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier are proven to be relevant in the practical implementation of public relations strategies by BAZNAS Sumut. The digital communication strategy that emphasizes active participation (engagement) and trust-building has led to increased community involvement in zakat and da'wah programs. The Islamic public relations approach grounded in da'wah values, along with the application of the Lovejoy & Saxton (2012) and Morgan & Hunt (1994) models, provides a robust conceptual foundation for establishing public communication that is effective, ethical, and capable of producing long-term impact.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that BAZNAS North Sumatra's use of social media particularly Instagram and TikTok has proven effective in fostering audience engagement. Interactive and educational content has successfully captured public attention, encouraged active participation, and enhanced public involvement in the institution's programs. By utilizing interactive features such as polls, live streaming, and storytelling, BAZNAS Sumut has managed to establish closer relationships with its audience.

Public trust in BAZNAS Sumut has also significantly increased, largely due to the transparency of information provided via social media and the official website. The clear and accessible presentation of zakat fund distribution reports, along with prompt responses to inquiries and active interaction by the social media team, have contributed substantially to the institution's credibility. Moreover, the involvement of religious leaders and influencers has played a crucial role in strengthening the public image of BAZNAS Sumut.

Several key factors influencing audience engagement and public trust include information transparency, responsiveness, and endorsement by religious figures. Transparent communication regarding the utilization of zakat, infaq, and sadaqah funds is vital for building trust. Additionally, the activeness of the social media administrators in engaging with the audience serves as a critical element in nurturing positive relationships.

To further enhance the effectiveness of its social media-based Islamic public relations, BAZNAS Sumut is advised to improve content consistency particularly on TikTok and to optimize its website to be more interactive and informative. Expanding collaborations with influencers could also help reach a broader audience and increase public participation in philanthropic activities.

Overall, this research provides valuable insights for the social media management of Islamic philanthropic institutions. Effective communication strategies can significantly increase engagement and public trust, positioning BAZNAS Sumut to continue strengthening its role in Islamic public relations through strategic and impactful use of digital media.

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