

Cyber Public Relations Strategy in Increasing Participation of the Certified Internship and Independent Study (MSIB) Program Through Instagram @magangmerdeka

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ABSTRACT

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Universities in Indonesia must adapt to prepare graduates who meet the needs of the world of work in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) or Freedom to Learn-Independent Campus program initiated by the Directorate General of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education and Culture Indonesia has organized the Certified Internship and Independent Study (MSIB) Program which provides real learning experiences for students. The Marketing and Public Relations (MPR) of the program implements a Cyber Public Relations strategy through Instagram @magangmerdeka to disseminate information and interact with students. This study aims to describe the Cyber Public Relations strategy implemented by the MPR Department in increasing student participation in the MSIB batch 4, 5, and 6 program through Instagram. The method used is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document studies from the @magangmerdeka account. The results showed that the MPR Department implemented a Cyber Public Relations strategy based on Holtz's theory, namely strategic with the Feature, Advantage, Benefit approach; integrated using pillar content and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC); targeted with a specific audience; and measurable through engagement rate, impression, conversion rate, and the AIDA model which emphasizes Awareness & Interest. Obstacles include the continuity of IMC messages and communication limitations due to the "No DM Service" policy. The PESO Model approach was also applied to increase audience reach and interaction. Although data on clicks or direct registrations from Instagram is not yet available, user interactions indicate the important role of Instagram in encouraging potential participants to register. Thus, the Cyber PR strategy through Instagram has proven effective in increasing student interest in the MSIB Kampus Merdeka Program.

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology opens opportunities for educational institutions to disseminate information through social media (Ambarwati et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2024). The Internet connects the world and erases distance and time limits in communication (Onggo, 2004; Putra & Anshari, 2016). The Internet has also changed the socialization pattern between internal and external parties through Public Relations as a liaison between the organization and its public (Huri & Astarini, 2021; Lu et al., 2023). Cyber Public Relations is a form of modern public relations

integrated with the Internet and social media (Putridinanti et al., 2023). According to Hidayat (in Putra & Anshari, 2016) Cyber Public Relations focuses on using digital and social media to reach audiences, disseminate information and marketing tools, and build and manage organizational images. In higher education, the application of Cyber Public Relations strategies is becoming increasingly relevant, especially in supporting the dissemination of information or policies launched by the government to improve the quality of education.

The implementation of Permendikbudristek No. 13 of 2022 is focused on improving the quality of learning, the quality of teaching staff, and higher education governance. The Directorate General of Higher Education launched the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program to support policies to improve the quality of higher education. This program aims to provide students with off-campus learning experiences so that they are ready to enter the world of work. MBKM consists of eight activities: internships, independent studies, student exchanges, school teaching, research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurship, and village development (Tim Microcredential Kemendikbud, 2021). Among these options, the Certified Internship and Independent Study (MSIB) is the most popular program for students. Since its introduction in 2021, the Internship and Certified Independent Study (MSIB) program has shown a significant upward trend in student participation (Ihsan, 2024).

MSIB is designed to answer the needs of the industry in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. Students can be directly involved in real projects through internships in companies or independent study training from industry partners. A certified internship is a program where students work in partner organizations as trainees for a certain period. Students gain practical experience and receive guidance from professional mentors. (Kementerian Pendidikan, Budaya, Riset, 2022). Meanwhile, Certified Independent Study is conducted through short courses, boot camps, or MOOCs, which provide specific skills and can be converted into credits. The Internship and Certified Independent Study (MSIB) program lasts for one semester and is equivalent to 20 credits (Kementerian Pendidikan, Budaya, Riset, 2022; Tim Microcredential Kemendikbud, 2021)

The MSIB program has seen a significant surge in participation since it was first launched in 2021. Table 1.1 shows the growth in the number of participants from the first to the seventh batches, with the highest spikes occurring in the fourth to sixth batches. This data indicates the high enthusiasm of students for the MSIB program.

Table 1. Comparative data the number of participants in each Batch of MSIB Kampus Merdeka (Source MSIB 2024 onboarding report)

No.	Batch	Participants
1.	1 st Batch	12.891
2.	2 nd Batch	24.877
3.	3 rd Batch	27.977
4.	4 th Batch	25.990
5.	5 th Batch	36.728
6.	6 th Batch	47.984
7..	7 th Batch	30.228

According to the Digital 2024: Global Overview Report by We Are Social Indonesia (2024) Instagram is one of the favorite social media platforms in Indonesia. Instagram ranks second as the most preferred platform, with a percentage of 19.6%, after WhatsApp, which is in the first position at 34.8%. Meanwhile, based on data regarding the most frequently used social media platforms, WhatsApp is also at the top with a percentage of users of 90.9%, followed by Instagram with 85.3%. The popularity of Instagram as one of the favorite and most frequently used social media platforms in Indonesia shows that this platform has great potential to reach the student audience.

Tabel 2. Comparative data on the number of Instagram social media followers for each Kampus Merdeka program (Source: Data retrived from the Instagram accounts of each program, accessed on April 15, 2025)

No.	Program Name	Instagram Account	Number of Followers
1	Pertukaran Mahasiswa	@pertukaranmahasiswamerdeka	291K
2	Magang/Praktik Kerja dan Studi Independen (MSIB)	@magangmerdeka	638K
3	Bantuan Pengajaran di satuan pendidikan	@praktisimengajar	72.5K
4	Penelitian	(Without Special Account)	-
5	Proyek Kemanusiaan	(Without Special Account)	-
6	Kegiatan Wirausaha	@wirausahamerdeka	70.5K
7	Kuliah Kerja Nyata Tematik	(Without Special Account)	-

Based on Table 2, the official Instagram account @magangmerdeka, which houses the Certified Internship and Independent Study (MSIB) program, has the highest number of followers among other Kampus Merdeka program accounts, which is 638 thousand. This number far exceeds other program accounts such as @pertukaranmahasiswamerdeka (291 thousand), @wirausahamerdeka (70.5 thousand), and @praktisimengajar (72.5 thousand). Some other programs do not even have dedicated Instagram accounts. This data reinforces that @magangmerdeka's Instagram has a wide audience and potential as a digital communication and promotion medium. Therefore, this account is a relevant choice as the object of research to see the Cyber Public Relations strategy in increasing student participation in the MSIB program.

Along with developing the MSIB program, several efforts have been made to increase student participation, such as the promotion of Instagram @magangmerdeka, which has a large following and the potential to reach a student audience. These efforts include creating relevant and interesting content using Instagram features. However, there is still room to improve and optimize Cyber Public Relations strategies to be more effective in increasing student participation.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of digital communication strategies in delivering public information through the Cyber Public Relations approach. Research by Diskominfo Jepara used Holtz's theory to analyze communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing strategic, integrative, measurable, and targeted aspects. The results show the importance of utilizing digital media thoroughly, including collaboration with media and influencers, to improve the quality of public information (Nihayah & Afifi, 2023). Meanwhile, research by Diskominfo West Java traced Cyber Public Relations activities through the @humas_jabar Instagram account using Regina Luttrell's The Circular Model of SoMe for Social Communication. The research describes four stages in social media management: share, optimize, manage, and engage, which aim to disseminate information, maximize messages, manage communication, and actively involve the public (Ichwan & Muhtadi, 2022).

However, previous studies have not specifically discussed implementing Cyber Public Relations strategies using the Holtz framework to increase student participation in the MSIB program through social media, especially Instagram. Therefore, this study aims to describe and analyze the Cyber Public Relations strategy implemented by the Marketing and Public Relations Department through the Instagram account @magangmerdeka to increase student participation in batches 4, 5, and 6.

2. Method

This study aims to describe and analyze the Cyber Public Relations strategy of the Marketing and Public Relations Department in increasing student participation in the MSIB Batch 4, 5, and 6 program through Instagram @magangmerdeka. To answer these problems, this research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method. According to Moleong (2014), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena holistically in a natural context by describing words and language. The case study was chosen to understand the Cyber Public Relations strategy implemented by the Marketing and Public Relations (MPR) Department in increasing MSIB Program participation through Instagram @magangmerdeka. Data was collected through in-depth interviews using purposive sampling techniques (Sugiyono, 2020) and documentation in Instagram content. Researchers chose informants with in-depth knowledge or understanding of the issues under study. The informants of this research are the Coordinator of the Marketing and Public Relations Department, the Head of MSIB, the followers, the internship, and certified independent study participants. Data analysis follows the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman dalam Sugiyono, 2020). Data validity testing was carried out using source triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and consistency of information (Moleong, 2014).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Results

The Marketing and Public Relations (MPR) Department uses the FAB (Feature, Advantage, Benefit) approach in its communication strategy to attract students to the MSIB program through Instagram @magangmerdeka. The features include basic information about the program, such as program duration, partner selection stages, and registration requirements. This information is delivered in an informative carousel format, such as in the MSIB batch 5 registration FAQ upload. Advantages are defined as the direct benefits students obtain, such as internship opportunities in the industry, skill development, and certification. For example, in the "3 Reasons You Should Join MSIB" upload, students are invited to understand the program's advantages more concretely. The benefit becomes the main focus of communication, which is the long-term positive impact for participants, such as increasing personal capacity, real work experience, and professional networking opportunities. The content of inspiring stories of MSIB alums is used to show the real benefits felt by participants and encourage other students to feel the same way.



Figure 1. Visualization of the Feature, Advantage, and Benefit Approach on Instagram Content of @magangmerdeka (Source: Instagram @magangmerdeka, accessed on February 17, 2025)

The application of FAB is reinforced by research on impact, satisfaction, and learning, which is then used as the basis for designing evidence-based communication messages. The digital communication strategy implemented by the MPR Department began with a focus on building engagement rates through active interaction on Instagram. Content such as inspirational stories, Q&A sessions, and quizzes were used to attract audience attention and participation. Engagement rate measures the depth of audience interaction, which can be seen from the number of likes, comments, and shares received from each post.

In addition, impression rate is a key metric to measure how widely information is spread among audiences, including those outside the MSIB Instagram account followers. The MPR Department is increasing the impression rate by focusing on more specific audience mapping, such as increasing regional coverage outside Java, such as in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Sumatra.

After successfully building engagement, the next step is to increase the conversion rate. This involves directing an already engaged audience to visit the Kampus Merdeka website, create an account, and register. The conversion rate is monitored through two stages:

- 1) Conversion to website visitors, namely, seeing how many participants click on links from social media to the Kampus Merdeka website, both through advertisements and messages conveyed.
- 2) Conversion from website traffic is how potential participants interact further on the site. This is measured by the number of users who click on the MSIB menu, read further information, and open an account to register.

The AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action) approach was applied to the published content, focusing on the awareness and interest stages. The published content aims to build audience awareness of the MSIB program and foster their interest in registering. Although there is no exact data on clicks or registrations directly from Instagram, participants' testimonials indicate that Instagram posts played a role in their decision to register. Khoerun Nisa Zakiatul Amaliyah (MSIB Batch 6 Participant) stated that Instagram content was a determining factor in her decision to enroll. In addition, Nadila Oktaviyani (Independent Study Batch 5 Participant) also felt that alum testimonials helped overcome her hesitation to enroll.

The interview results also show that many students tend to register in the last 7-14 days before the registration deadline. This indicates that the desire and action stages still need to be optimized. Strategies such as personal reminders, countdowns, and dissemination of testimonials of previous participants are optimized to encourage potential participants to take action sooner, as well as regional socialization to various campuses about MSIB.

As part of evaluation and reputation management, the MSIB team conducts internal and external audits to assess the success of the strategies implemented. The team also monitors negative issues on social media and responds through various communication channels, such as WhatsApp, social media, and the Help Center.

Regarding content, the MPR Department utilized various Instagram features such as reels, carousels, stories, highlights, live sessions, and questions to increase interaction. Using alum testimonials and user-generated content with hashtags such as #MSIB #MagangMerdeka #MSIBBatch4 #MSIBBatch5 #MSIBBatch6 helped increase trust and organic reach. In addition, content is also divided into categories such as education, inspiration, registration information, and trend-based content to attract students. The number of @magangmerdeka Instagram posts continued to increase from Batch 4 to Batch 6 as part of the effort to maintain presence and attract audience attention. Batch 4 recorded 123 posts, Batch 5 as many as 198, and increased again to 235 in Batch 6. Although, in general, the types of content are relatively similar, such as registration information, program education, collaborative content, and student mobilization, the publication strategy is focused on the consistency and intensity of information distribution. Visually, there was an improvement in aesthetics and display dynamics, with the use of increasingly varied and audience-oriented graphic elements in each batch. However, the achievement of likes shows a fluctuating trend, with the most popular content in Batch 4 reaching 39.6 thousand likes, dropping to 35.4 thousand in Batch 5, then rising again to 44.2 thousand in Batch 6.

To reach audiences outside the Java region, the team penetrated the market through Instagram Ads targeted to regions such as Sumatra and Sulawesi. These ads aim to increase inclusivity and equalize students' understanding of the MSIB program across Indonesia. External collaboration was also carried out to strengthen the strategy. The MPR team collaborated with national media such as Kompas, Tempo, and Detik through media gathering activities and collaborated with influencers to educate the importance of internship experience without directly promoting the MSIB program.

3.2 Discussion

Strategic Implementation of Cyber Public Relations by the MSIB Marketing and PR Department

Based on the results of in-depth interviews conducted by researchers, the Instagram account @magangmerdeka is the most active digital channel used by the Marketing and Public Relations Department to disseminate information related to the MSIB program to increase student participation.

Referring to the concept proposed by Holtz (2002), Cyber Public Relations activities carried out by the Marketing and Public Relations Department to manage the @magangmerdeka account show four main characteristics, namely:

1. **Strategic**, in the context of Public Relations, refers to communication activities planned and oriented toward the organization's long-term goals, focusing on directly impacting achieving business goals (Holtz, 2002). This is reflected in the communication strategy carried out by the Marketing and Public Relations (MPR) Department of the Internship and Certified Independent Study (MSIB) program based on the FAB principle: Feature, Advantage, and Benefit. Amir Saatari, MPR Coordinator, explained that features include the main characteristics of the program, such as the duration of implementation for three to six months and the flow of partner selection. Meanwhile, advantage refers to the tangible benefits participants gain, such as direct experience in the industrial world and improved skills. Meanwhile, benefits focus on long-term impacts, such as a wider professional network and academic recognition from universities. The FAB principles were not developed speculatively. The Feature, Advantage, Benefit (FAB) strategy has been used in the context of marketing communications, including in the research of Sutrisno & Syukur (2023) regarding the Development of Bantimutung Village as a Creative Tourism Village through Social Media-Based Potential Promotion. The journal shows that the FAB strategy plays a role in simplifying the concept of copywriting into two main components, namely features and benefits, to help partners understand the advantages of the product before promoting it through social media. This approach emphasizes that before carrying out social media-based promotions, it is important for partners to understand the benefits of the product and identify the target market. In the training, participants were invited to identify aspects of the product to be promoted and the benefits offered to the audience. To facilitate understanding, the implementation team used the "what" and "why" approach. "What" refers to the features of the product, while "why" explains why someone needs to use it, which is related to the benefits provided. Through this effort, the community service team realized that understanding the advantages and benefits of a product, as well as identifying the target market, are important steps before carrying out effective promotions to the community. In the context of promoting tourist villages, the FAB strategy that utilizes the features and benefits components has proven effective in building an interesting and relevant narrative for the audience. Meanwhile, the FAB strategy in the program is structured more comprehensively by combining the three components, namely features, advantages, and benefits. This approach helps the audience understand the program features as well as the advantages and benefits they obtain.

The MPR Department regularly conducts research, including student satisfaction surveys and program impact evaluations. Findings from the research are used as a foundation in shaping the communication narrative disseminated through social media. Through a data-driven approach, the team presents content by highlighting true stories and testimonials from previous participants. These stories were designed to build credibility and reinforce the program's message. One of the narratives that caught the attention of potential participants came from the experience of Khoerun Nisa Zakiyatul Amaliyah, a student at Gunadarma University. She revealed that @magangmerdeka's Instagram posts played a big role in convincing her to apply for the MSIB program. Initially hesitant, Nisa felt more determined after seeing various inspirational stories from previous batch students. The available content

not only provides technical information but also psychologically helps in preparing for the program.

2. **Integrated**, in the context of Public Relations refers to using the Internet to develop a comprehensive and interconnected communication program so that each communication element works synergistically to support organizational goals ((Holtz, 2002). Along with technological developments, social media now plays an important role in expanding and strengthening Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies by utilizing various social platforms as an inclusive and potential tool for designing effective marketing communications in the modern era (Rehman et al., 2022). This approach is implemented by the Marketing and Public Relations Department through an Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategy to maintain message alignment across various digital channels, such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and email.

Message consistency is maintained through structured pillar content so that the information received by students remains uniform, both through posts, comments, and direct communication. Nevertheless, the implementation in the field shows challenges, such as minimal activity on Facebook, no special MSIB YouTube account, "No DM Service" policy, and lack of response in the comments column. Efforts to maintain two-way communication are also made through live sessions on Instagram, which are re-uploaded in the form of Reels, "Ask Me Question" sessions and organizing Zoom meetings whose recordings are uploaded to YouTube. In addition, promotional materials such as digital flyers were also published through uploads on the Instagram feed as part of information dissemination.

3. **Targeted**, refers to maximized Internet use because of its advantages over other communication media in reaching a more specific and targeted audience (Holtz, 2002). This principle is applied in the communication strategy of the MSIB program, which targets active Indonesian citizens registered in PDDIKTI, especially 4th-semester students when registering. Undergraduate students must be in semester 5 when the program takes place, while vocational students (D2, D3, D4) follow the semester 2 provisions. In addition, this program is open to all majors under the Ministry of Education and Culture because they have not graduated or are willing to postpone graduation. Information regarding the segmentation of participants is conveyed through Instagram @magangmerdeka.
4. **Measurable**, every strategy implemented must be accompanied by clear indicators and metrics to evaluate its impact (Holtz, 2002). The Marketing and Public Relations Department implements the measurable principle by applying success indicators such as engagement rate, impression, conversion rate, and the application of the AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action) approach, especially at the awareness and interest stages.

The initial strategy began with building engagement through active interaction between MSIB's social media accounts, especially Instagram, and potential participants. Interactive content such as inspirational stories, Q&A sessions, and quizzes were used to attract audience participation. The success indicator of this strategy is seen from two main metrics: engagement rate and impression.

Engagement rate reflects the depth of audience interaction, the engagement rate metric shows how intensively the audience is involved this can be seen from the number of likes, shares, and comments. Online engagement can include likes, shares, and comments obtained in a post (Rohadian & Amir, 2019). Impression refers to the number of post views seen by followers and people who do not follow the account (Georgakopoulou et al., 2020 in Kusuma et al., 2023). It also illustrates how widely information reaches the public. The impression target is increased through more focused demographic mapping; impression reflects how widely information is spread, for example, increasing the reach of the Sumatra region from 300 thousand to 2 million. Once engagement is achieved, the strategy continues driving the conversion rate, which is directing potential participants to register. This is also related to how users tend to stay longer on a site if they feel engaged or immersed in its content, known as flow (Richard & Chandra, 2005; Visinescu et al., 2015 in McDowell et

al., 2016). Site design that supports this flow experience can increase the likelihood of users continuing the interaction and eventually converting. Site design that supports this experience can increase the likelihood that users will continue the interaction and ultimately convert. In the context of Kampus Merdeka, Conversion is measured in two stages: the first Conversion is the number of clicks from social media to the Kampus Merdeka website, and the second Conversion is further interactions on the site, such as opening the MSIB menu, reading information, and creating an account to register. Therefore, good site design encourages users to stay longer and take further actions, such as registering.

Based on an interview with Marketing and Public Relations Coordinator Amir Saatari, after potential participants create an account, digital communication continues by applying the AIDA approach, especially at the awareness and interest stages. Published content aims to build awareness of the program and foster interest in joining MSIB. While exact data on the number of clicks or registrations directly sourced from social media is not available, Instagram was cited as the main platform for attracting students. Participants' testimonials indicate that Instagram posts played a role in their decision to enroll, as shared by Khoerun Nisa Zakiyatul Amaliyah (MSIB Batch 6 Participant), who stated that Instagram content was a deciding factor in her decision to enroll. In addition, Nadila Oktaviyani (Independent Study Batch 5 Participant) also felt that alum testimonials helped overcome her hesitation to enroll.

On the other hand, although the strategy has emphasized the awareness and interest stages, the interview results show that most students tend to register in the last 7-14 days before closing. This finding indicates that the desire and action stages must still be optimized. The desire stage refers to the drive or tendency of individuals to make decisions, which are influenced by cognitive, affective, and psychomotor factors, as well as social and emotional support (Shaleh & Wahab; Ahmadi et al.; Crow & Crow in Fadhli, 2023). Meanwhile, action occurs when potential participants strongly desire to take action (Kotler & Keller in Jordan, 2023). Strategies related to these two stages have been carried out indirectly, such as through personal reminder messages, registration countdowns, and disseminating testimonials from previous participants. External factors such as support from lecturers, parents, and regional socialization activities also play a role in influencing enrollment decisions. Cyber public relations practices are also implemented through reputation management and crisis management strategies, including negative issue monitoring and rapid response through social media, WhatsApp, and the Help Center. The MSIB team regularly conducts internal and external audits and evaluations to maintain program transparency and sustainability. Thus, although a direct link between high engagement and an increase in the number of applicants cannot be definitively concluded, MSIB's digital strategy on Instagram makes an important contribution in attracting the attention and interest of potential participants.

Media Distribution through Instagram Based on the PESO Model

MSIB's Marketing and Public Relations Department utilizes the Instagram platform to disseminate information about its programs and establish communication with the public. This aligns with Laksamana's view (2018) which states that public relations has two main roles: a producer presenting information content to the target audience and a publisher distributing information through public communication media. The PESO framework represents four quadrants of communication (Macnamara in Slowikowski et al., 2021). Instagram @magangmerdeka can be analyzed using the PESO Model approach, namely Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned (Dietrich, 2016 in Özer & Asst, 2025).

1. **Paid**, the Marketing and Public Relations Department initially only relied on organic dissemination of information through social media, then began to utilize paid media, namely the Instagram Ads feature, to increase the inclusiveness of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, especially the MSIB program. This is in line with the understanding that paid media involves the controlled dissemination of messages by purchasing space or airtime; for example, advertising on social media includes sponsored

advertising on search engines and social media (Dietrich, 2016; Benedek, 2022; in Özer & Asst, 2025) This strategy is focused on certain geographic areas such as Sumatra and Sulawesi, to reach Instagram users who are not yet followers of the official MSIB account. This step was taken because most of Kampus Merdeka's social media followers still come from Java. At the same time, information distribution is a priority so that students from other regions, such as Kalimantan and eastern Indonesia, also have equal access to information about this program. The level of engagement from these regions is still relatively low, so the department also utilizes other channels, such as universities and lecturers, as intermediaries in expanding the reach of information to students.

2. **Earned**, MSIB program communication strategy includes collaboration with mass media and influencers to expand the reach of information and increase public understanding of the program's benefits. Through media gathering activities, the MSIB team presents evaluation data from students, lecturers, and universities to journalists from various national media, such as Kompas, Tempo, and Detik. The media then presented the information according to their respective editorial policies, but the main message about the program's benefits was maintained. The resulting coverage is a form of third-party publication without direct costs, which reflects earned media, which relies on external parties to spread messages (Dietrich, 2016; Benedek, 2022; in Özer & Asst, 2025). In addition, collaboration with influencers conveys the importance of internship experience for students' career development in general. The dissemination of information is also reinforced through media upload highlights on the @magangmerdeka Instagram highlights feature, which features various external publications regarding MSIB's contribution to supporting student work readiness and encouraging active involvement in various sectors.
3. **Shared**, Communication strategies in the shared media category on Instagram @magangmerdeka show active student participation through the use of the hashtag #MSIB #MagangMerdeka #MSIBBatch4 #MSIBBatch5 #MSIBBatch6, and the account tag feature helps expand the reach of information about the program. The @magangmerdeka account also actively re-shares student content, building a digital community connected to the MSIB program. In addition, engagement is strengthened through interactive features such as quizzes, Q&A sessions, and challenges on Instagram Story. The "Ask Me Question" feature is utilized to answer questions directly from followers, while light quizzes increase interaction and strengthen the closeness between admins and students. This participation shows that two-way communication is one of the approaches used to build engagement and strengthen the dissemination of MSIB program information on social media. This practice reflects the role of social media as a space for content sharing and two-way communication, where users help spread and support institutional messages (Özer & Asst, 2025).
4. **Owned**, the @magangmerdeka account itself is a form of owned media, a digital communication channel fully owned and controlled by the institution. With 647 thousand followers and more than 1392 uploads until February 2025, this account is the most active communication channel for distributing information about the MSIB program. In Batch 4, 123 uploads were recorder, Batch 5 was 198, and increased again to 235 in Batch 6. The increasing number of content uploads in each batch shows consistency and continuous efforts in delivering information to the audience. Content such as carousels, reels, and highlights are strategically arranged to convey important information, in line with the concept of owned media that includes the institution's website, apps, and social media accounts (Dietrich, 2016; Benedek, 2022; in Özer & Asst, 2025). The links in the bio also point to official sources such as the MSIB website and press releases, showing how owned media is used to its full potential to distribute information and build engagement with audiences.

This research does not use the Circular Model of SoMe framework as in Ichwan and Muhtadi (2022), but refers to Holtz's theory and the PESO model. Unlike Regina Luttrell's approach, which emphasizes the social digital communication cycle (share, optimize, manage, engage), Holtz's approach in this study focuses more on strategic, integrative, targeted, and measurable principles. In

research conducted by Nihayah and Afifi (2023) on the public communication strategy of Diskominfo Jepara, it was found that they also used Holtz's theory and emphasized the importance of collaboration with the media and the use of influencers. This is in line with the findings in this study, where MSIB's Cyber Public Relations strategy also relies on collaboration with mass media, utilization of paid promotional features such as Instagram Ads, and cooperation with influencers as part of the implementation of paid and earned media elements in the PESO model.

However, there is a significant difference in the measurable aspect. Suppose, in Diskominfo Jepara's research, the measurement aspect of communication effectiveness was considered not optimal. In that case, the results of this study show a clearer direction in applying measurement indicators, such as impression, engagement, and conversion rate. Although data on clicks that register directly from Instagram social media is not yet available, user interactions such as opening the MSIB menu, reading the information, and creating an account show that Instagram social media can encourage potential participants to seek more information and register. These findings make a new contribution to the development of Cyber Public Relations literature, particularly in the context of higher education. So far, Cyber PR practices have been mostly studied in a local government context. Thus, this research broadens the scope of the study and shows that Cyber PR strategies can also be effectively applied in a national-scale educational program such as MSIB.

4. Conclusion

The Cyber Public Relations strategy through Instagram has proven effective in increasing student interest in the MSIB Kampus Merdeka program. This strategy is implemented by the Marketing and Public Relations Department with focuses on the Feature, Advantage, Benefit (FAB) approach. An Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) approach is used to maintain message consistency. However, some challenges remain, such as the lack of activity on Facebook, the absence of a special MSIB YouTube account, the "No DM Service" policy, and the lack of response to comments that limit interaction.

The target audience is specifically determined to be students registered in PDDIKTI who meet certain semester requirements. MSIB's digital strategy focuses on engagement, number of impressions, conversion rate, and applying the AIDA model. The Desire and Action stages have not been applied explicitly, but the elements are still visible in the communications carried out, such as registration reminders, participant testimonials, and socialization activities in various regions. Even so, most students still tend to register in the last 7-14 days before closing, which indicates that the encouragement to register immediately has not been optimal.

The conversion rate is seen from the number of users who move from social media to the website and create an account. Although there is no specific data on the number of clicks on the MSIB menu or direct registration from Instagram social media, user interactions such as opening the MSIB menu, reading information, and creating an account indicate that Instagram social media can encourage potential participants to seek more information and register. The interview results also show that the digital strategy through Instagram can increase student interest in joining the MSIB program. This is also supported by the increasing number of content uploads in each batch, which shows consistency and continuous efforts in delivering information.

The PESO model is thoroughly utilized through paid media such as Instagram Ads, Publicity through mass media, collaboration with influencers, and active student engagement through interactive content and Instagram features such as Ask Me Question, quizzes, hashtags, and content reposts. This approach increases audience engagement, creates a more personalized experience, and encourages student participation in the MSIB program.

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