



## Public Perception of The Instagram Account of PPL & KPM International 2025 In The Formation of The Image of STAIN Meulaboh

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### Abstract

The development of social media has transformed how higher education institutions build their image in the digital public sphere. However, studies focusing on students as non-professional communication actors in managing social media for international programs within PTKIN remain limited. This study aims to analyze public perception of the @pplkpm\_internasional\_2025 Instagram account and its role in shaping the image of STAIN Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh as an internationally oriented Islamic university. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through digital observation of 111 posts (January–October 2025) and in-depth interviews with seven informants. Data were analyzed through reduction, categorization, and conclusion drawing.

The results show that consistent uploads, the use of visual identity (logos and international-language slogans), and dominant educational and documentary content shape public perception that the account represents an official institutional program. Audience engagement through likes and comments strengthens positive image formation. Students, as non-professional communication actors, are able to effectively build institutional image through experience-based narratives. This study concludes that institutional image formation in the digital era is participatory and driven by student-based communication. It implies that universities need strategic guidelines for managing social media of international programs by actively involving students.

**Keywords:** digital image, public perception, international program

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital communication technology has changed the pattern of interaction between higher education institutions and the public. Social media is a strategic space for universities to build an image, expand networks, and display institutional identities in digital public spaces. With more than 191 million social media users in Indonesia in 2023, public perception of educational institutions is increasingly shaped through digital representation. In the global context, the ability of universities to manage digital communication is an important factor in improving the reputation and credibility of institutions (Citra, et al: 2024).

Instagram as a visual-based platform has a significant role in shaping institutional image. Through a combination of images, videos, and narratives, Instagram not only serves as a documentation medium, but also as an arena for the construction of symbolic meaning. The public acts as a co-creator of image through interactions such as likes and comments. The visualization of international activities and collaborative narratives are markers of the global orientation of universities (Erlin, et al: 2024), so that the management of Instagram accounts becomes a strategic communication practice that affects public perception (Nataha: 2024).

In the context of PTKIN, the phenomenon of managing social media accounts by students shows interesting dynamics. STAIN Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh organizes International PPL and KPM Programs in Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam which is published through @pplkpm\_internasional\_2025's Instagram account. This account is managed by students across departments, not by professional public relations, so that students act as non-professional communication actors who carry out public relations functions implicitly (Dita, et al: 2023). This condition produces an authentic narrative, but it also has the potential to cause inconsistency in the image of the institution (Sarah and Roswita, 2023).

Previous studies have highlighted Instagram's role in shaping an institution's image. This study shows that the quality of information delivery, consistency of publications, and responsiveness of @humas\_pemkomedan accounts significantly affect the positive image of the Medan City Government (Hannisa, et al: 2025). In line with that, this study emphasizes that the professional management of @chocodot.official accounts through structured content planning, internal coordination, and audience involvement is able to improve the corporate image of PT Tama Cokelat Indonesia (Made, 2023). In addition, it was found that visual aesthetics, destination narratives, and audience interaction on @explorelombok account play an important role in shaping public perception of Lombok Island tourism brands. These findings confirm that Instagram not only functions as a promotional medium, but also as a strategic means in building an institution's identity and image. However, research on the management of social media accounts by non-professional students, especially in international programs, is still limited. The absence of institutional standards for managing international program accounts has the potential to cause fragmentation of digital identities, where narratives, visuals, and communication styles are situational and not always aligned with the strategic vision of the institution. This condition can give rise to disharmony between the image projected by the campus and the image perceived by the public, so it needs to be studied systematically.

Previous research has shown that Instagram is effective in shaping the image of institutions through content consistency and audience engagement, but it generally focuses on management by professional actors. In the context of higher education, especially PTKIN, studies on students as



account managers of international programs are still limited<sup>1</sup>. In addition, there is no conceptual model that explains how student experiences are constructed into digital narratives that shape public perception. This gap shows that digital communication studies still tend to be top-down oriented and have not accommodated participatory practices based on experience (Echo, 2024).

Based on these gaps, this study aims to: (1) analyze public perception of the Instagram account of PPL & KPM International 2025; and (2) analyze the role of these accounts in shaping the image of STAIN Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh as an internationally oriented university (Cut, 2024).

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand phenomena in depth in a natural context, with researchers as the main instrument in the process of data collection and analysis. The focus of the research is directed at the meaning of public perception of digital content published through @pplkpm\_internasional\_2025 Instagram account during the implementation period of the STAIN Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh International PPL & KPM Program.

### 2. Location and Research Subject

This research was conducted in the digital space, namely Instagram accounts @pplkpm\_internasional\_2025 as the main medium of observation. The subjects of the study are followers of accounts that show active involvement, such as liking, commenting, or interacting through direct messages. Informants were determined using purposive sampling techniques, with the following criteria:

- (1) have a high intensity of interaction,
- (2) have accessed and understood the content,
- (3) represent diverse backgrounds (internal and external).

**Table 1. Informant Profile**

Yes	Code	Gender	Role	Criteria
1	INF 1	Female	Account Manager	Active Admin
2	INF 2	Female	Account Manager	Active Admin
3	INF 3	Male	Follower	Active Follower
4	INF 4	Male	DPL Lecturer	Program Advisor
5	INF 5	Male	Campus Public Relations	Internal Observer
6	INF 6	Female	Malaysian Partners	Overseas collaborators
7	INF 7	Male	Thai/Vietnamese partners	Overseas collaborators



### **3. Data Collection Instruments**

Data collection techniques are carried out through:

- a. Digital observations were carried out systematically on 111 uploads, including content patterns, post consistency, caption use, and audience interaction.
- b. Semi-structured interviews with seven informants to explore perceptions of content quality, student professionalism, and institutional image.
- c. Documentation is in the form of screenshots of uploads, comments, post archives, interaction insight data, and visual materials such as logos and slogans.

### **4. Data Analysis Procedure**

Data analysis using Miles and Huberman's interactive models, which include:

- a. Data reduction: The process of sorting and simplifying data relevant to the focus of the research.
- b. Data presentation: Data is compiled in the form of a systematic descriptive narrative to facilitate interpretation.
- c. Conclusion drawing and verification: Conducted on an ongoing basis to ensure the consistency and accuracy of research findings.

### **5. Data Validity (Trustworthiness)**

To maintain the validity of the data, this study used:

- a. Source triangulation: comparing data from account managers, followers, lecturers, and overseas partners
- b. Triangulation techniques: combining observation, interviews, and documentation
- c. Member checking: confirmation of the results of the interview to the informant to ensure the suitability of interpretation
- d. Data traceability (audit trail): systematic documentation of the research process

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULT**

#### **1. Public Perception of PPL & KPM International Instagram Accounts 2025**

The results of the study show that the Instagram account of PPL & KPM International 2025 is perceived by the public as an official representation of international programs, not just a documentation account of student activities. This perception is formed through the consistency of uploads, the regularity of the flow of information, and the uniformity of the visual identity used. The public considers that the account is managed in a planned manner and has a clear communication purpose, so as to create a professional and institutional impression<sup>2</sup>.

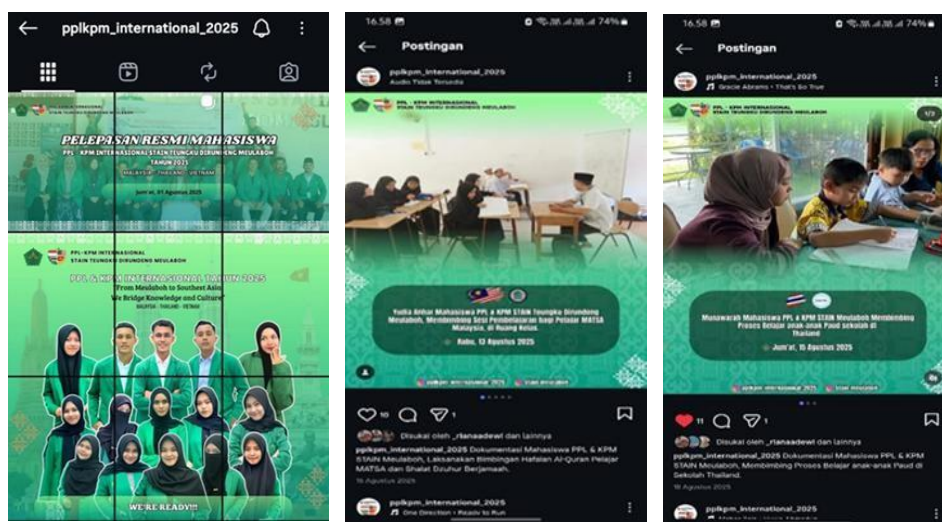
One of the informants stated that the account "is already like the official account of the campus, not just ordinary documentation". In addition, the use of international language logos and slogans strengthens the digital identity of the account. The slogan "From Meulaboh to Southeast Asia: We Bridge Knowledge and Culture" is perceived as an affirmation of the program's global orientation.



The informant interpreted the slogan as a representation of the role of students in cross-border exchange of knowledge and culture.

Content dominated by documentation of educational activities, such as teaching, international collaboration, and community service, is perceived as a form of program implementation. The public views the content as a reliable source of information.

Digital interaction through likes, comments, and direct messages shows the audience's engagement in interpreting the content. The response given reflects the audience's acceptance of the information conveyed through the account.



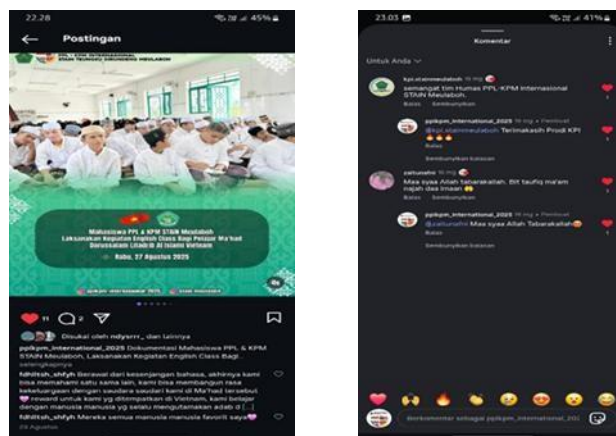
**Figure 3. Documentation of Teaching Student Activities and Cross-Country Collaboration.**  
**Source: Instagram @pplkpm\_international\_2025**

## 2. The Role of Instagram Accounts in the Formation of Institutional Image

The findings of the study show that Instagram accounts not only function as a medium of information, but also play a role in the formation of an institution's image. Students as account managers act as non-professional communication actors who carry out informal public relations functions, such as content planning, visual identity management, and interaction with audiences.

One of the informants stated that "the content shared feels more real because it comes from the direct experience of students". This statement indicates that the published content is perceived as a representation of students' empirical experiences during the program. Students not only act as technical implementers, but also as conveyors of the experience of activities through the narrative built in each upload.

Students also play the role of institutional narrative builders based on personal experience. The narrative conveyed is perceived as a representation of students' direct experiences while participating in the program. The Instagram account contributes to building the image of STAIN Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh as an internationally oriented Islamic university, as well as playing a role in the construction of the institution's image more<sup>3</sup> broadly.



**Figure 4. Public interaction on Instagram uploads.**  
**Source: Instagram @applkpm\_international\_2025**

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that Instagram accounts function as a strategic medium in the formation of institutional image through participatory digital communication. The account is not only a means of conveying information, but also plays a role in building meaning through interaction between the account manager and the audience.

In the perspective of Perception Theory, visual content, narrative, and digital identity act as a stimulus that is processed through the stages of selection, organization, and interpretation by the audience, thereby shaping the perception of institutional credibility. The consistency of the content and the uniformity of visual identity reinforce the process of forming such perceptions.

Within the framework of Image Theory, the use of logos and slogans reflects the projected image built by the account manager. Meanwhile, the audience's response showed the formation of a perceived image which then developed into a corporate image. This indicates that there is an alignment between the projected image and the image received by the public.

From a digital communication perspective, the interaction between accounts and audiences shows that social media serves as a two-way communication space. The audience not only acts as a receiver of information, but also as a participant in the process of forming meaning. These findings are in line with previous research that affirmed the importance of content consistency and audience engagement in building institutional credibility on social media.

Furthermore, the findings regarding the role of students as non-professional communication actors expand the study of digital public relations in higher education. Students are able to carry out institutional communication functions through an experience-based approach. The narrative conveyed is perceived as a representation of students' direct experiences while participating in the program.

The novelty of this research lies in the affirmation that the formation of institutional image is not only structural, but also built through student-based participatory digital communication. This model integrates digital communication stimuli, public perception processes, audience interaction, and social validation in a single institutional image-building framework.

Theoretically, this research strengthens the integration between perception theory, image theory, and digital communication in the context of higher education. Practically, these findings show that universities need to involve students as strategic partners in social media management so that the formation of the institution's image becomes more authentic and participatory.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that the public perceives the PPL & KPM International 2025 Instagram account as an official representation of international programs, not just a media for documenting student activities. This perception is formed through the consistency of content, visual strength, international narrative, and the use of digital identity in the form of logos and slogans that are presented in a sustainable manner. In addition, these accounts are perceived to have a role in shaping the image of institutions through participatory digital communication, where audience interaction also affects the legitimacy and credibility of institutions in digital public spaces.

Theoretically, this research contributes by expanding the study of digital communication and institutional image theory. The findings show that image formation does not only take place top-down through professional actors, but also participatory through non-professional actors, namely students. This research also confirms that student experiences can be constructed into digital narratives that function as a stimulus in the process of public perception, which then contributes to the formation of institutional image.

From a practical perspective, this research provides implications for the management of State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) in the management of digital communication. Universities need to develop a collaborative social media management model by involving students as strategic partners in institutional communication. In addition, clear guidelines are needed related to visual identity standardization, content planning, and digital interaction management. Improving digital communication literacy for students is also important so that the communication practices carried out remain in line with the image of the institution.

However, this study has some limitations. The limited number of informants means that the findings are not fully representative of the public perception at large. In addition, the focus of the research on one Instagram account in the context of a specific international program makes the research results contextual. The limitation of the observation period also does not allow analysis of long-term dynamics in the formation of institutional image on social media.

Therefore, further research is recommended to involve a larger and more diverse number of informants, as well as to expand the object of the study to various social media platforms in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. The use of a mixed methods approach is also recommended to strengthen the analysis. In addition, future research can develop and test student-based digital communication models in various university contexts to strengthen the generalization of findings and theoretical contributions in the study of digital communication and higher education public relations.

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