



Vol. 14, No. 1, January 2026	Copyright © 2026, is licensed under a CC-BY-SA
Pages: 343-370	Publisher: SCAD Independent
DOI: https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v14i1.2383	P-ISSN: 2338-8617 / E-ISSN: 2443-2067

Amanah-Based Public Relations and Digital Trust in Islamic Private Universities

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Received: June 23, 2025	Accepted: January 17, 2026	Published: January 30, 2026
Article Url: https://journal.scadindependent.org/index.php/jipeuradeun/article/view/2383		

Abstract

Public trust has emerged as a critical challenge for Private Islamic Universities (PTIS) in the digital era, particularly regarding the translation of Islamic ethical values from symbolic claims into concrete institutional practices. This study examines how the value of Amanah (trust) is internalized within Public Relations (PR) practices at PTIS in Jambi, positioning trust as both a religious-ethical principle and a professional standard that guides governance, communication, and digital engagement. Using a qualitative multi-site case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with institutional leaders, PR personnel, academic staff, administrative officers, and students, complemented by observation of institutional digital platforms. Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that Amanah functions as an internal governing logic, shaping leadership integrity, policy transparency, participatory communication, and digital accountability. Trust is further strengthened through inclusive leadership, open communication channels, transparent academic and administrative policies, and responsible digital governance. However, the study also identifies persistent challenges, including inconsistent leadership modelling, weak oversight mechanisms, limited digital literacy, and concerns regarding academic data security. These results indicate that ethical values alone are insufficient to sustain digital trust without structural reinforcement and accountable digital systems. Ultimately, this study contributes to the field by conceptualizing Amanah as an operational PR principle that integrates Islamic ethics with contemporary digital trust governance in higher education.

Keywords: *Amanah; Public Relations; Digital Trust; Islamic Higher Education.*

A. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital communication technologies has fundamentally reshaped how institutions construct and negotiate public credibility. Institutional trust is no longer derived primarily from formal authority or academic output, but increasingly from image-based and value-oriented perceptions formed through digital visibility, transparency, and patterns of interaction. In this context, communication management becomes a strategic arena in which meanings, norms, and shared values are continuously negotiated in the public sphere. Effective digital communication is therefore not only about information dissemination, but also about maintaining social cohesion, ethical orientation, and legitimacy in diverse publics (Fachrurazi et al., 2023; Sutisna & Khorri, 2024).

Within higher education, this transformation places universities under persistent public scrutiny, where credibility is mediated by online communication practices, digital reputation, and perceived ethical accountability. Leadership plays a crucial role in this process, as institutional values and commitments are increasingly communicated through digitally mediated leadership discourse and governance practices. Studies on digital leadership in Islamic educational settings demonstrate that the ability of leaders to align technological innovation with ethical responsibility and institutional values significantly influences public trust and organizational credibility (Ismaulidina et al., 2020; Riski et al., 2024; Mohsi et al., 2025). In this sense, digital communication functions not merely as a technical infrastructure, but as a normative space in which institutional integrity and trust are publicly constructed and evaluated.

This transformation presents a particularly complex challenge for Private Islamic Universities (PTIS). Beyond meeting professional and managerial standards, PTIS are morally obligated to embody Islamic ethical values, specifically those related to trust, honesty, and responsibility, within their governance and public communication (Zvereva, 2023; Mujahidin et al., 2024; Rasyid et al., 2024). In practice, however, many PTIS struggle to translate these moral commitments into coherent digital communication strategies. In this specific context of Jambi, preliminary observations indicate that institutional websites and social media platforms are often underutilized for dialogic engagement. These platforms frequently provide limited transparency regarding academic governance and lack consistent narratives that articulate Islamic values in



operational terms. Such deficiencies weaken institutional credibility, erode stakeholder trust, and foster scepticism among prospective students and parents, despite the strong religious legitimacy and social capital PTIS inherently possess. Simultaneously, PTIS are pressured to remain competitive within an increasingly globalized higher education environment (Çelebi, 2020; Marlina et al., 2024), where local religious traditions are rarely translated into strategic digital assets (Aretio, 2021; Payne et al., 2023).

Previous studies have emphasized the strategic role of digital branding and Public Relations (PR) in strengthening institutional image and reputation within higher education (Kartinawati et al., 2024; J. Lee et al., 2020). Research on transparency has further identified multiple dimensions of the concept, distinguishing among process, case, language, cross-channel, and cost transparency as critical elements shaping public trust in institutional communication (Schenk et al., 2024; Rasyid et al., 2024). However, much of the existing literature remains concentrated on surface-level practices, such as social media presence, promotional aesthetics, and visibility metrics, rather than examining the deeper, value-based mechanisms underlying trust formation (Wesna Astara, 2018; Ali & Isnaini, 2024).

Similarly, studies on Islamic higher education have primarily focused on identity affirmation and normative ethical discourse, noting that technological readiness and its integration into institutional communication remain limited (Amet, 2023; Currie & Ryan, 2023). These studies pay comparatively little attention to how Islamic values are translated into concrete PR routines, leadership communication practices, digital governance structures, and stakeholder interaction processes (Khalilah, 2023). Consequently, existing scholarship provides an insufficient explanation of how values such as *Amanah* (trust) operate as practical mechanisms that shape institutional communication patterns, reputation formation, and digital trust outcomes within the specific context of PTIS (Blanes Climent, 2022; De Micheli & Taylor, 2024; Radu, 2022).

This limitation signals a conceptual gap rather than a merely empirical one, as existing studies tend to treat trust as a normative or instrumental outcome without sufficiently theorizing *Amanah* as an operational value within public relations practices. Although trust is widely acknowledged as central to leadership credibility and institutional legitimacy, prior scholarship has not yet articulated how *Amanah* can function as an integrative ethical framework that connects leadership behaviour,



communication transparency, and digital infrastructure into a coherent trust-building mechanism. Recent discussions on the digital mediation of Islamic knowledge and ethics show that religious values are not passively preserved in digital spaces, but actively reinterpreted and operationalized through technology, governance, and communicative practices (Ali & Isnaini, 2024). In parallel, studies on digital public services and academic infrastructures emphasize that transparency, accountability, and system reliability are key determinants of institutional trust, yet these elements are rarely examined through an explicitly ethical-religious lens that foregrounds *Amanah* as a guiding principle (Faizah et al., 2025).

Moreover, few studies adopt a multi-dimensional analytical lens that combines symbolic, interactional, and reputational perspectives to explain how religious ethics actively shape digital PR practices in Islamic higher education institutions. Existing research on digital readiness, digital literacy, and academic technology use tends to focus on technical competence, efficiency, and user behaviour, while underplaying the normative and moral dimensions embedded in digital engagement (Suwendi et al., 2025; Yakubu et al., 2025). Similarly, strategic approaches to digital literacy initiatives in Islamic educational settings highlight managerial and organizational aspects, but stop short of theorizing how ethical values such as *Amanah* are communicated symbolically, enacted interactionally, and accumulated reputationally in digital public relations ecosystems (Saepurohman et al., 2025). As a result, the literature lacks an integrated framework that explains how religious ethics do not merely accompany, but actively structure, digital PR practices and institutional trust formation within Islamic higher education contexts.

To address this gap, this study conceptualizes *Amanah* not as a static theological norm, but as a dynamic and institutionalized value that is actively embedded in Public Relations strategies and everyday communicative practices. Rather than being treated as an abstract moral ideal, *Amanah* is approached as a performative value that is constructed, communicated, and evaluated through institutional actions, narratives, and digital representations. The analysis is informed by Symbolic Interaction Theory (Blumer), which emphasizes that meanings of trust are socially produced through ongoing interactions, shared symbols, and interpretive processes (Ansori et al., 2022; Mirawati et al., 2025). Within this framework, trust emerges through leadership



discourse, institutional language, digital content, and public representations of transparency and accountability, all of which function as symbolic cues shaping stakeholder perceptions (Ginting, 2021; Mirawati et al., 2025; Saleh et al., 2025). By adopting this perspective, the study positions *Amanah* as a relational and communicative process, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how Islamic ethical values are translated into strategic digital PR practices within Islamic higher education institutions.

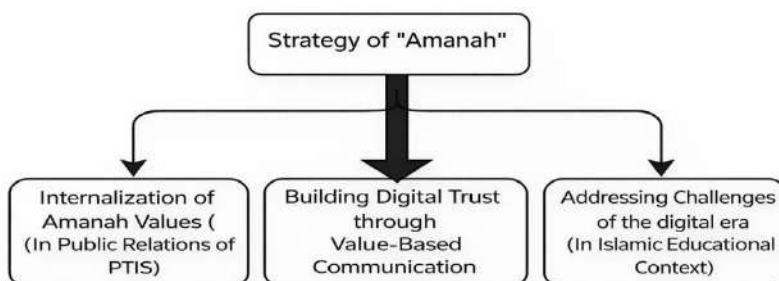


Figure 1. Strategy of Amanah

In parallel, Image and Reputation Theory (Fombrun) provides an analytical framework to examine how consistency, transparency, and ethical communication contribute to long-term institutional credibility in digital environments (Ali et al., 2024; Khalid & Nafee, 2023; Sherin, 2022). When integrated with a value-based perspective, this theory allows *Amanah* to be understood not only as a moral claim, but as a reputational resource that is accumulated through sustained institutional practices. Digital infrastructures, such as transparent information systems and accountable data management, play a critical role in reinforcing credibility by ensuring reliability, accessibility, and procedural clarity in institutional communication (Faizah et al., 2025). At the leadership level, ethical consistency and value-driven digital leadership further strengthen reputational trust, as leaders function as symbolic carriers of institutional values whose actions shape public perceptions of integrity and responsibility (Riski et al., 2024).

Moreover, the internalization of ethical values within academic and organizational practices – such as discipline, accountability, and moral responsibility – demonstrates that reputation is deeply rooted in everyday institutional conduct, not merely in external messaging (Abd Ghani et al., 2025). Together, these perspectives enable a



multidimensional examination of *Amanah* across symbolic, interactional, and reputational domains, moving decisively beyond its treatment as abstract moral legitimation toward a dynamic framework for trust-building in digital higher education contexts.

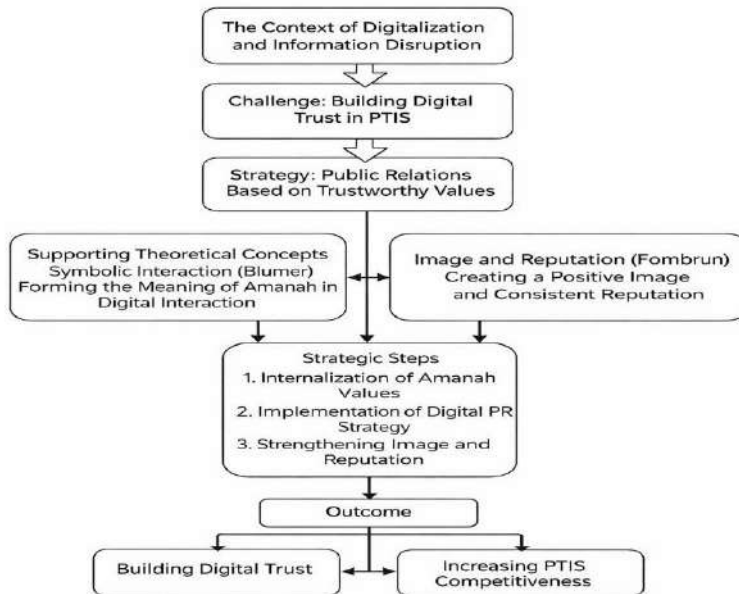


Figure 2. Map concept

Therefore, this study offers a clear novel contribution by proposing an *Amanah*-based Public Relations model that explains how Islamic ethical values are internalized across institutional policy, leadership practices, and digital communication systems. As illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, *Amanah* operates simultaneously as a value-based branding principle, a digital PR strategy, and a trust-generating mechanism that influences stakeholder engagement and institutional legitimacy.

Based on this framework, the objectives of the study are threefold: (1) to analyze how the value of *Amanah* is internalized within the Public Relations strategies of PTIS; (2) to identify trust-based branding and digital communication practices that contribute to digital trust formation; and (3) to examine the challenges and opportunities faced by PTIS in implementing value-oriented PR strategies amid digital disruption. By focusing on PTIS in Jambi, this study offers contextually grounded insights while contributing to broader international discussions on ethical communication, digital trust, and value-based institutional branding in higher education.



B. Method

This study employed a comparative multi-site qualitative case study design to examine how the value of *Amanah* (trust) is conceptualized, internalized, and operationalized within Public Relations (PR) practices at Private Islamic Universities (PTIS) in Jambi. A qualitative approach was selected for its suitability in investigating meaning-making processes, value enactment, and culturally embedded organizational practices within institutional contexts (Bhangu et al., 2023). The multi-site case study design facilitates in-depth contextual analysis while enabling cross-site comparison, particularly regarding how religious values intersect with leadership communication, PR strategies, and digital governance practices (John W. Creswell, 2019). The unit of analysis is institutional PR practice, encompassing leadership communication, PR strategies, and the digital governance mechanisms through which *Amanah* is enacted.

The research sites consisted of five PTIS in Jambi Province, selected purposively based on accreditation status, the activity of digital communication platforms, and organizational maturity in managing public engagement. One key informant from each institution (R1–R5) was selected based on their strategic roles in PR management, digital branding, or institutional leadership; these participants functioned as institutional gatekeepers with comprehensive knowledge of PR decision-making. The research objects included PR practices, digital communication processes, and symbolic representations of *Amanah* embedded in institutional policies, leadership discourse, and online platforms. Cross-site comparison focused on three analytical dimensions: leadership and value transmission, transparency-oriented communication practices, and digital governance related to trust and accountability.

Data were collected through three techniques: semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and institutional document analysis, ensuring methodological triangulation (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Interviews were conducted over three months, with sessions lasting 60–90 minutes. Interview protocols focused on institutional interpretations of *Amanah*, PR strategies, symbolic representations of trust in digital spaces, and challenges concerning transparency, data security, and stakeholder engagement. Observation involved the systematic monitoring of official institutional websites and social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, and institutional news portals), focusing on content frequency, interaction patterns, transparency, and value-based narratives. Additionally, institutional documents such as PR guidelines, internal



communication reports, and publicly available policy statements were analyzed to contextualize and corroborate the data.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Coding was conducted in two stages: inductive open coding, followed by theoretically informed coding using constructs from Symbolic Interaction Theory and Image-Reputation Theory. Codes were then organized into higher-order themes representing ethical-theological, organizational-PR, and digital governance dimensions. Ethical procedures were rigorously implemented: institutional permission was obtained, informed consent was secured, participant identities were anonymized using coded labels (R1-R5), and digital data were stored securely. These procedures enhance the validity and transferability of the findings for comparable Islamic higher education contexts (Byrne, 2022).

C. Results and Discussion

In a disruptive digital era, Private Islamic Universities (PTIS) face the challenge of building robust digital trust amid intense global competition and shifting public communication behaviors. The image and reputation of these institutions no longer depend solely on academic quality; they increasingly rely on the ability to manage value-based communication through digital channels. The value of trust, rooted in Islamic local-religious wisdom, is identified as a strategic foundation for building the digital image and reputation of PTIS. By managing Public Relations (PR) through the lens of trust-based values, PTIS can cultivate both emotional and rational trust within the public.

1. Results

a. Internalization of the value of "Trust" in PR at PTIS Jambi

In-depth interviews with institutional leaders (R1-R3) and students produced frequent references to *Amanah* in relation to governance, leadership behavior, and academic practices. R1, a Dean of Islamic Studies, stated that *Amanah* is formally embedded in the institution's foundational documents, including its vision, mission, and policy frameworks. R1 explained: "*This value is not just jargon; it is the spirit of the campus's policies, ensuring that each activity reflects honesty, responsibility, and professionalism... however, it sometimes [made] too bureaucratic,*" (Interview with TD, October 14, 2024)



R2, a PR staff member responsible for communication strategy, described leadership expectations regarding the enactment of *Amanah* in daily institutional practices: “*Campus leaders play a strategic role in instilling the value of trust, which is reflected in our daily activities.*” (Interview with CC, October 20, 2024)

In contrast, R3, an informant involved in internal coordination, reported inconsistencies in how these expectations are realized across organizational units, particularly concerning supervision and leadership modeling. Student data provided further context for these observations. One student (Student Respondent 1) described discrepancies between ethical discourse and academic practices: “*While some lecturers promote academic honesty, practices such as cheating and shortcut-seeking still occur. Observations of institutional behavior, including irregular supervision and limited integrity enforcement, confirm the need for stronger internal controls and a community-wide commitment.*” (Interview with Tata, October 20, 2024)

Across the interviews, leaders and PR staff maintained that *Amanah* is present within formal governance and communication frameworks. However, both internal informants and students reported significant variation in how this value is enacted in daily academic and administrative routines, particularly regarding supervisory consistency, leadership modeling, and academic integrity.

b. Implementation of public relations “*Amanah*”

Interview data from R1 and R2 indicate that Public Relations practices at PTIS Jambi are organized around several recurring activities and mechanisms that informants associate with the value of *Amanah*. Through thematic coding of interview transcripts, institutional documents, and observational notes, five recurring clusters of PR-related practices were identified. These clusters are presented in Table 1 as empirical categorizations derived directly from the data, rather than as a prescriptive or theoretical framework.

Table 1. Implementation of “Amanah” values in PR at PTIS Jambi

No.	Strategic Aspect	Implementation Focus	Communication Objectives
1.	Horizontal Relationships and Openness	Cultivating communication between leaders and staff, minimizing	peer-level between organizational climate that reinforces trust



No.	Strategic Aspect	Implementation Focus	Communication Objectives
1.	Between Employees	the dominance of formal hierarchies	
2.	Inclusive Leadership	Encouraging a leadership style avoids social distance and excessive formalism	Creating an atmosphere of accessible, honest, and responsible communication
3.	Internal Communication Facilitation	Providing dedicated internal channels, such as newsletters and academic forums	Strengthening the internalization of trust values and streamlining the flow of institutional information flow
4.	Islamic Value-Based Culture	Establishing an institutional culture that upholds Islamic ethics in daily practice	Embedding the value of trust as the foundation for work ethics and organizational behavior
5.	Reciprocal Public Communication	Integrating public feedback into policymaking through opinion research and engagement	Demonstrating transparency and public accountability as an enactment of <i>Amanah</i>

Supporting interview excerpts illustrate how these practices operate in daily communication. R3 described the implementation of a formal feedback mechanism: *“We created an online complaint box where all campus members can voice their concerns.”* (Interview with IA, October 14, 2024)

However, R1 noted that participation in this channel remains limited. Regarding communication norms, R2 emphasized the importance of information management, stating: *“Information must be accurate, confidential, and free from hoaxes.”* (Interview with CC, October 20, 2024)

Student perspectives provided further insight into the efficacy of these mechanisms. Student Respondent 2 commented: *“The campus could be more active in listening to input from students and the academic community. More open and accountable communication, for example, through regular forums between leaders and students, would be very helpful in building trust.”* (Interview with Adi, October 20, 2024)

The data show that PR practices associated with *Amanah* at PTIS Jambi encompass internal relationship management, leadership communication styles, the provision of internal media, value-based organizational culture, and public feedback mechanisms. While formal structures, such as complaint channels, internal forums,



and communication guidelines, are present across all institutions, informants reported varying levels of participation and utilization, particularly regarding mechanisms intended to facilitate reciprocal communication.

These findings demonstrate that *Amanah* is operationalized in PR through identifiable organizational structures and communication routines, rather than solely through symbolic messaging. The five practice clusters identified in Table 1 reflect how trust is translated into internal coordination, leadership interaction, information management, and public engagement. However, the data also suggest that the efficacy of these mechanisms depends heavily on stakeholder participation, which fluctuates across institutional contexts and different actor groups.

c. Digital trust building

Data regarding digital trust were obtained from in-depth interviews with R2–R5, all of whom are directly involved in digital communication management, information systems, or institutional planning at PTIS Jambi. The interview transcripts indicate that informants referred to both technical arrangements and value-oriented considerations when defining digital trust. R2 emphasized the necessity of system-level protection mechanisms: *“We need a special application to secure institutional documents,”* (Interview with CC, October 20, 2024).

Conversely, R3 described digital trust using value-based terminology rooted in institutional norms: *“Digital trust is the public’s belief in a system that is honest and aligned with Islamic values,”* (Interview with IA, October 14, 2024).

Furthermore, R4 and R5 highlighted the importance of information consistency and data-driven digital communication: *“Digital trust requires consistent and honest information across all platforms; we analyze community needs to increase trust and attract new students,”* (Interview with ST and AC, October 20, 2024).

Student interview data further addressed the digital dimension, specifically regarding user awareness and security practices, as illustrated in Figure 4.





Figure 4. The digital platforms

Several students raised concerns regarding account security, password management, and personal data protection, expressing a need for clearer guidance on digital literacy. Complementing these insights, observational data were collected from institutional digital platforms, including *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *YouTube*, and official university websites. These observations focused on content type, update frequencies, and interaction patterns. Notably, the data indicate limited two-way engagement, particularly regarding responses to comments or structured user dialogue.

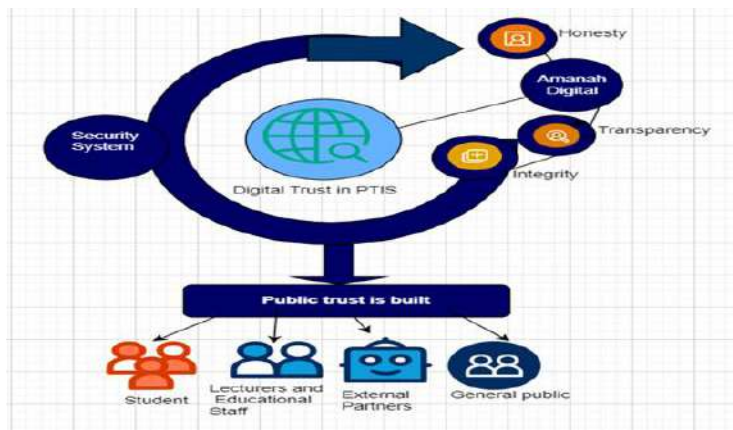


Figure 5. Conceptual digital trust at PTIS

The data reveal that digital trust at PTIS Jambi is shaped by two broad domains. First, informants consistently highlighted technical measures, including document security applications, platform management, and data-handling procedures. Second,



interviewees emphasized ethical considerations, such as honesty, transparency, and value alignment, in digital communication. While observational data show that institutional platforms are regularly updated, the content consists primarily of announcements and promotional material. Consequently, interaction patterns suggest a lack of dialogic engagement, characterized by minimal responses to user comments and underutilized interactive features.

Based on the categorization of interview and observational data, Figure 4 depicts empirical instances of PTIS Jambi's digital platforms, demonstrating the scope of the institution's digital presence as reported by informants and observed during data collection. Meanwhile, Figure 5 visually organizes the recurring elements found in the data into two empirically derived components: (1) system security, which encompasses data protection, user privacy, and digital infrastructure, and (2) digital *Amanah*, which refers to ethical behavior in digital communication as articulated by informants. These figures serve as descriptive representations of patterns emerging from the data, rather than as normative or theoretical frameworks.

d. Challenges and opportunities of digital trust at PTIS

Data concerning the challenges and opportunities in digital trust development were obtained from in-depth interviews with institutional informants R1–R5, all of whom are involved in leadership, public relations, digital communication, or institutional planning at PTIS Jambi. The interview excerpts reveal recurring concerns regarding human resources, funding, data security, information quality, and community engagement. R1 described the limitations related to human resources: *“The challenge faced by many institutions or their implementers is that Human Resources (HR) is limited and unable to keep pace with the constant evolution of digital trust.”* (Interview with TD, October 14, 2024)

R3 further highlighted funding constraints alongside HR issues: *“The challenge lies in the Human Resources (HR) sector and the lack of funding support,”* (Interview with IA, October 14, 2024). Additionally, R2 emphasized significant concerns regarding data security: *“One of the biggest challenges in building digital trust is data security... we store a wide range of sensitive data – from the personal information of students and staff to research results and academic documents.”* (Interview with IA, October 14, 2024)



Moreover, R4 identified challenges related to information quality and user competence: *“Challenges in building digital trust in the era of open information include the spread of hoaxes, unclear information sources, the security of personal data, and a lack of digital literacy among users.”* (Interview with ST, October 20, 2024)

Alongside these challenges, the interview data also highlighted significant opportunities. R5 described community engagement as a pivotal factor: *“The greatest opportunity to strengthen the image of Amanah lies in how we... come into direct contact with the community and convince them of the integrity of our institution.”* (Interview with AC, October 20, 2024). Similarly, R2 emphasized the potential for transparency-based practices: *“Provide clear and easy access for the public to understand academic policies, student admissions, scholarship management, and the flow of campus fund management.”* (Interview with CC, October 20, 2024)

Next, R3 highlighted digital content strategies: *“The biggest opportunity... is to optimize digital platforms to disseminate information that is honest, transparent, and based on real achievements,”* (Interview with IA, October 14, 2024). Finally, R4 emphasized the importance of responsiveness through social media mechanisms: *“Highlight positive news and take advantage of the online complaint box by consistently following up and making service improvements.”* (Interview with ST, October 20, 2024)

The interview data reveal that informants consistently identified challenges related to human resource capacity, funding availability, data security, information credibility, and user digital literacy. Simultaneously, they identified existing or potential opportunities associated with community engagement, the transparency of institutional information, digital content dissemination, and responsiveness through online platforms.

According to the categorization of interview data, the challenges and opportunities for digital trust at PTIS Jambi emerge as two empirically distinct but concurrently expressed thematic sets. Informants identify challenges primarily within internal capacity and digital risk management, whereas opportunities are situated in public participation and information disclosure. This subsection describes how institutional actors perceive and communicate these issues, leaving the analytical assessment and strategic implications to be addressed in the Discussion section.



2. Discussion

This study demonstrates that the internalization of *Amanah* within Public Relations (PR) practices at Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTIS) in Jambi represents a substantive convergence between Islamic ethical principles and contemporary communication governance, particularly within digitally mediated environments. Rather than positioning religious values as symbolic ornaments or mere contextual references, the findings indicate that *Amanah* functions as a practical governance logic that actively shapes leadership behavior, communication transparency, and stakeholder engagement.

In this sense, *Amanah* operates not merely as a moral ideal or theological abstraction, but as an organizing principle that informs institutional decision-making, communication strategies, and accountability mechanisms. This empirical positioning is consistent with the integrative communication model proposed by Taljaard et al. (2019), which argues that ethical values rooted in religious and cultural traditions can function as foundational resources for institutional trust-building. This is particularly relevant in complex organizational settings where legitimacy and credibility are subject to continuous negotiation (Taljaard & de Beer, 2019).

At the ethical-professional level, the findings reveal that *Amanah* operates simultaneously across theological, moral, and professional domains. This layered operation reinforces the argument that Islamic values, when internalized institutionally, possess the capacity to shape organizational conduct in substantive ways, rather than merely legitimizing institutional narratives symbolically. Such a configuration supports the spiritual leadership framework articulated by Samul et al. (2021), which emphasizes integrity, honesty, and value-driven leadership as critical drivers of organizational commitment, credibility, and trust (Samul & Wangmo, 2021).

Within the PTIS Jambi context, leadership openness, policy transparency, and ethical communication practices reflect what Sison and Fontrodona (2012) conceptualize as “corporate virtue ethics,” wherein moral values serve as guiding norms for institutional action rather than rhetorical instruments for image management (Frémeaux, 2020; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012). The findings thus affirm that ethical leadership grounded in *Amanah* is not peripheral to PR practice but constitutes its normative and operational core.



Theoretically, these findings align with Iriyanto and Purwanto's (2023) analysis of Islamic university governance, which identifies *Amanah* as a central principle underpinning academic integrity and ethical decision-making (Iriyanto & Purwanto, 2023). However, this study advances the literature by moving beyond normative assertions to empirically demonstrate how *Amanah* is translated into concrete PR routines. These include transparent academic policies, anti-plagiarism commitments, complaint-handling mechanisms, and open digital communication channels (Ali & Isnaini, 2024; Abdullah et al., 2025). In this sense, *Amanah* is treated not as an abstract ethical claim, but as an operationalized value embedded in institutional routines and communication infrastructures. This contribution is significant because it bridges a persistent gap between normative discussions of Islamic ethics and empirical studies of organizational communication, an area of higher education that has often remained under-theorized.

Despite firm institutional commitments to ethical values, the findings reveal that the internalization of *Amanah* remains uneven across organizational units. Inconsistencies in leadership modeling, weak supervisory mechanisms, and fragmented professional cultures continue to undermine the full realization of trust-based governance. These findings resonate with the argument made by Lee and Yue (2020) regarding the fragility of value-based governance when structural reinforcement and consistent institutional exemplars are absent (Y. Lee & Yue, 2020). Similarly, Kurniawati (2022) observes that Islamic institutions frequently experience tensions between normative religious ideals and administrative realities, particularly when ethical commitments are not supported by robust governance systems and monitoring mechanisms (Kurniawati, 2022; Saleh et al., 2025; Mohsi et al., 2025). The present study confirms that without coherent leadership practices and institutionalized oversight, the internalization of *Amanah* risks becoming selective, situational, and dependent on individual actors rather than systemic and sustainable.

From a social learning perspective, these findings support Bandura's proposition that values are internalized through observable, repeated modeling rather than through formal instruction alone. The absence of consistent leadership exemplars weakens the transmission of *Amanah* as a lived institutional value, limiting its influence on organizational culture (Adinugraha et al., 2024; Susanto et al., 2024).



Student feedback highlighting gaps in transparency and responsiveness further reinforces stakeholder theory's emphasis on participation, dialogue, and reciprocal accountability as prerequisites for sustainable institutional trust (Łuczak et al., 2021). In this respect, trust emerges not as a static attribute but as a dynamic outcome of ongoing interactions between institutional actors and stakeholders, mediated through communication practices and leadership behavior.

In the digital domain, the findings underscore that trust is mediated not only through communicative messages but also through the technological infrastructures, platforms, and security protocols that enable institutional interaction. PTIS Jambi's efforts to optimize digital platforms, as noted by informants R2 and R4, reflect the growing relevance of institution-based trust in digitally mediated environments (Gautam, 2024; Zhao et al., 2023). Digital trust, in this context, encompasses data security, transparency of online services, responsiveness to stakeholder inquiries, and the credibility of information dissemination.

These dimensions align with broader discussions of digital governance, where trust is increasingly built on system reliability and institutional accountability rather than interpersonal interaction alone (Ali & Isnaini, 2024; Susanto et al., 2024). In practice, the emphasis on online complaint mechanisms, academic bulletins, and active social media engagement resonates with international research demonstrating that transparent and interactive digital communication enhances perceived institutional credibility (Elewah & Jalaeddine, 2022; Nurwahyuni & Tabrani ZA, 2025).

However, concerns regarding cybersecurity vulnerabilities and the circulation of misinformation, as highlighted by informants R2 and R4, mirror global challenges faced by higher education institutions in sustaining digital trust. These challenges suggest that ethical commitments, such as *Amanah*, must be complemented by technical capacity, policy enforcement, and continuous system evaluation to remain effective in rapidly evolving digital contexts.

Synthesizing these findings, this study advances a conceptual framework that positions *Amanah* as a core value permeating both the internal and external dimensions of institutional PR. This framework comprises four interrelated components: leadership integrity and ethical modeling (Godbless, 2021; Abd Ghani et al., 2025); communication transparency characterized by honesty, clarity, and accessibility



(Frémeaux, 2020; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012); digital engagement through secure, interactive, and responsive platforms (Nickerson et al., 2017; McKnight & Chervany, 2002); and participatory culture, emphasizing stakeholder involvement and open dialogue (Kivits & Sawang, 2021; Freeman, 1984). The convergence of these elements produces a holistic model in which Islamic ethical values function simultaneously as moral imperatives and practical strategies for institutional development.

From an academic standpoint, this study contributes to the growing discourse on value-based communication in higher education by integrating Islamic ethics with PR and digital trust literature. It extends Bowen's (2004) ethical PR framework by contextualizing it within a faith-based educational setting, thereby offering a model that is both culturally grounded and theoretically generative. Moreover, the findings suggest a conceptual refinement of the classical two-way symmetrical communication model proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), incorporating theological values as integral components of credibility-building processes (Cuenca-Fontbona et al., 2022; Park & Conroy, 2022). In doing so, the study positions itself clearly within contemporary debates on ethical communication, digital governance, and the role of values in organizational legitimacy.

Beyond its local and national relevance, this study carries significant implications for global discussions on ethical communication, digital governance, and trust-building in higher education. In an era marked by declining public trust in educational institutions, data insecurity, and the erosion of institutional credibility worldwide, these findings demonstrate that value-based communication, grounded in religious ethics, can function as a viable governance framework rather than a mere cultural anomaly. The *Amanah*-based PR model articulated in this study offers a transferable conceptual lens for faith-based and value-oriented universities globally, particularly in contexts where moral legitimacy and institutional trust are central to organizational survival and public accountability.

At the global level, this study challenges the dominance of secular-instrumentalist models of Public Relations by demonstrating that ethical values rooted in religious traditions can be systematically operationalized within modern digital communication systems. This contribution is specifically relevant for higher education institutions across



the Global South, the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia, where religious values continue to shape organizational identity yet are often marginalized in mainstream communication theory. By empirically integrating Islamic ethics with PR, digital trust, and governance literature, this study expands the theoretical geography of communication studies. It responds directly to calls for more pluralistic, culturally grounded, and epistemically inclusive models of institutional communication (Cuenca-Fontbona et al., 2022; Park & Conroy, 2022).

Moreover, the study's emphasis on institution-based trust, digital transparency, and ethical leadership resonates with global concerns surrounding platform governance, cybersecurity, and stakeholder accountability in higher education. As universities increasingly rely on digital infrastructures to manage admissions, academic records, and public engagement, trust is no longer built solely through interpersonal interaction; it is constituted through systems, policies, and digital practices (Gautam, 2024; Zhao et al., 2023). In this context, the *Amanah*-based PR framework contributes to international debates by offering an ethically grounded alternative to purely technocratic approaches to digital governance, emphasizing that trust must be embedded not only in technology but also in values, leadership, and institutional culture.

Finally, by proposing a model that integrates leadership integrity, communication transparency, digital engagement, and participatory culture, this study provides a conceptual bridge between ethical PR theory and the contemporary governance challenges universities face globally. The findings suggest that trust-based communication models rooted in moral responsibility can enhance institutional resilience, legitimacy, and public confidence across diverse cultural and regulatory environments. As such, this research does not merely document a local case but advances a globally relevant framework for rethinking how values, trust, and digital communication intersect in higher education institutions worldwide.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research is confined to five PTIS within a single province, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader institutional and cultural settings. Second, the primary informants were internal institutional actors; this may introduce an internal bias and does not fully represent the perspectives of external



stakeholders, such as alumni, parents, and industry partners. Third, the reliance on qualitative methods, while suitable for exploring meaning and value internalization, does not allow for a quantitative measurement of the long-term impact of *Amanah*-based PR on institutional reputation. Finally, the observation of digital platforms was conducted within a specific timeframe, which may not fully capture the inherently dynamic and evolving nature of digital communication. These limitations should be carefully considered when interpreting the results and situating them within the broader literature.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of *Amanah* within Public Relations (PR) practices at Private Islamic Universities (PTIS) in Jambi functions as an internal governing logic rather than a symbolic or rhetorical construct. Empirically, *Amanah* emerges as a multidimensional value that integrates theological obligation, ethical responsibility, and professional accountability into everyday institutional practices. The findings demonstrate that institutional trust is not produced solely by declarative commitments to Islamic values; rather, it is forged through the consistent translation of *Amanah* into organizational routines. This includes exemplary leadership conduct, transparent and verifiable policy communication, participatory stakeholder engagement, and accountable digital governance. In digitally mediated institutional environments, trust formation extends beyond communicative narratives to encompass the integrity of digital systems, platform administration, and information security. This positions digital infrastructure as a substantive and inseparable component of ethical PR practice in the modern era.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the literature by advancing an *Amanah*-based digital trust PR model structured around two interdependent pillars: *digital Amanah* and *system-based trust*. *Digital Amanah* reflects the internalization of moral accountability through leadership integrity, transparent decision-making, and inclusive participation. Simultaneously, *system-based trust* refers to the institutionalization of ethical commitments through secure digital platforms, reliable information management, and responsible data governance.

By empirically demonstrating how these two pillars intersect in practice, the study extends conventional public relations and two-way symmetrical communication frameworks. It repositions religious ethics as an operational variable that actively



shapes digital reputation and institutional legitimacy within faith-based higher education. Practically, the model offers PTIS a value-based yet operationally grounded framework for strengthening public trust amid increasing digitalization.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to several limitations that suggest directions for future research. The focus on a limited number of institutions within a single provincial context constrains the broader generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the reliance on internal elite informants may limit the representation of external stakeholder perspectives, while the relatively short duration of digital platform observation restricts insights into long-term trust dynamics. Future studies are therefore encouraged to adopt comparative, multi-method designs across diverse institutional and regional settings. Such research should incorporate broader stakeholder groups, such as students, alumni, parents, and external partners, and employ longitudinal approaches to assess the sustainability of *Amanah*-based PR practices over time.

The central takeaway of this study is that religious values alone are insufficient to generate digital trust in Private Islamic Universities. Trust is established only when *Amanah* is consistently enacted through accountable leadership, transparent and verifiable communication, and responsible digital governance. When these conditions are fulfilled, Islamic ethical principles function as a strategic institutional asset that enhances legitimacy and credibility in the digital age; when they are not, ethical claims risk becoming performative, ultimately undermining public trust rather than strengthening it.

Acknowledgments

The researcher sincerely acknowledges the support of PTIS Jambi (IAI Syekh Maulana Qori Bangko, IAI An-Nadwah Kuala Tungkal, Universitas Islam Mamba'ul Ulum, Institut Islam Ma'arif, and Universitas Islam Sarolangun). Special thanks are extended to the Rectors and PR personnel of these institutions for their invaluable insights and encouragement throughout this research process.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted in the absence of any commercial, financial, or personal relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. All



interpretations and conclusions presented in this study are based solely on the authors' scholarly judgment and empirical findings.

Declaration of Generative AI

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI) tools and similar digital applications were used in a limited and responsible manner during manuscript preparation, specifically for language refinement, grammatical checking, and improvement of textual clarity. The use of such tools did not involve the generation of research data, the analysis or interpretation of findings, or the formulation of scientific arguments. All substantive intellectual contributions, including research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and conclusions, are solely the responsibility of the authors. The authors affirm that the use of AI-assisted tools complies with ethical standards of academic publishing and does not compromise the originality, integrity, or accountability of the research.

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