RESEARCH ARTICLE

PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE DIFABIS COFFEE AND TEA PROGRAM BY BAZNAS BAZIS JAKARTA

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Manuscript Info

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Abstract

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This study examines public relations strategies for inclusive employment through a case study of the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program implemented by BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta. Using a qualitative case study approach grounded in the constructivist paradigm, the research analyzes how inclusive employment is designed, communicated, and evaluated within a service-sector setting. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with organizational stakeholders, deaf baristas, and non-disabled customers, complemented by participant observation and document analysis. The analysis applies the Research–Action–Communication–Evaluation (RACE) framework to systematically examine public relations practices across program stages. The findings reveal that inclusive employment is most effective when public relations functions extend beyond promotional activities to encompass social listening, participatory action, and dialogic communication. The use of Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO), visual communication tools, and narrative storytelling enabled meaningful interaction between employees with disabilities and customers, transforming routine service encounters into inclusive social experiences.Moreover, participatory evaluation practices strengthened organizational learning and reinforced stakeholder trust. The study contributes to public relations and inclusive employment literature by demonstrating how strategic communication can support disability-inclusive workplaces,particularly within nonprofit and faith-based organizations. The findings highlight the potential of public relations as a mechanism for social transformation that integrates economic empowerment, communication practices, and values of equality in everyday organizational life.

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Introduction:-
Inclusive employment for persons with disabilities has become a central concern in global development discourse, particularly as labor markets continue to reproduce structural inequalities despite progressive legal frameworks

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(Hossain, 2025; Schur et al., 2021). Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that persons with disabilities experience significantly lower employment rates, limited job mobility, and poorer working conditions compared to non-disabled workers, even in countries with anti-discrimination legislation (Bredgaard, 2022; Berre et al., 2025). These disparities are sustained by interrelated barriers, including inaccessible recruitment systems, stigmatizing employer attitudes, and organizational cultures that privilege normative productivity standards (Schwitter et al., 2025).

Recent labor market research identifies recruitment and hiring practices as a critical bottleneck that perpetuates disability employment gaps, as employers often perceive disability as a risk factor rather than a dimension of workforce diversity (Schwitter et al., 2025; Berre et al., 2025). Beyond recruitment, workplace sustainability for employees with disabilities is shaped by the availability of reasonable accommodations, assistive technologies, and psychosocial support mechanisms that enable meaningful participation (Alasim et al., 2025; van Berkel et al., 2024). Without these conditions, disability inclusion initiatives risk becoming symbolic gestures rather than pathways to economic independence and social participation (Raišienė, 2025).

In service-sector industries such as hospitality and food and beverage, the inclusion of workers with disabilities introduces additional layers of complexity due to the centrality of interpersonal interaction and customer experience (Doan et al., 2023). Studies in hospitality management reveal that customer perceptions of service quality are influenced not only by technical competence but also by communicative clarity, emotional engagement, and the organization's framing of inclusion (Kim et al., 2025; Awad et al., 2023). When inclusion is poorly communicated, workers with disabilities may be perceived as beneficiaries of charity rather than as professionals, reinforcing paternalistic stereotypes (Jamin et al., 2024).

Conversely, evidence suggests that when inclusive employment is embedded within coherent organizational narratives and supported by visible operational practices, it can enhance brand reputation, customer loyalty, and perceived social value (Kim et al., 2025; Jurado-Caraballo et al., 2024). This finding aligns with emerging scholarship on disability-inclusive ecosystems, which emphasizes the integration of human resource practices, service design, and strategic communication to normalize diversity in everyday organizational life (Jamin et al., 2024). In this context, communication functions as a mediating mechanism that translates internal inclusion practices into shared social meaning (Heide et al., 2024).

From a strategic communication perspective, public relations (PR) plays a pivotal role in shaping how inclusive employment initiatives are conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated (Gillberg& Vigsø, 2024). PR scholarship increasingly positions communication as a form of social practice that constructs legitimacy, trust, and stakeholder engagement, particularly in initiatives related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) (Heide et al., 2024; Mullin & Sander, 2024). However, scholars also caution against "inclusion washing," whereby organizations promote inclusive imagery without substantive organizational change (Gillberg& Vigsø, 2024).

The RACE model Research, Action, Communication, and Evaluation offers a structured framework for examining how PR strategies can support inclusive employment through evidence-based planning, participatory implementation, dialogic communication, and reflective assessment (Huda et al., 2024). Research-driven PR enables organizations to identify social needs and stakeholder expectations; action translates insights into operational programs; communication mediates meaning through narratives and interaction; and evaluation ensures accountability and continuous improvement (Huda et al., 2024; Raišienė, 2025).

Within this theoretical and empirical landscape, the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program implemented by BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta represents a distinctive case of inclusive employment embedded within a social finance institution. Unlike corporate-driven diversity initiatives, this program integrates disability-inclusive employment with zakat-based social empowerment, positioning work as both an economic and moral practice. By employing deaf baristas and foregrounding inclusive communication practices such as the use of Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO) and digital storytelling the program transforms the service encounter into a site of public education and social interaction (Wismany&Ganesya, 2024).

Existing studies on disability-inclusive cafes indicate that direct interaction between customers and deaf workers can reduce stigma and foster empathy when supported by appropriate communication design and organizational facilitation (Doan et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2025). However, there remains limited research examining how public

relations strategies systematically structure these interactions and translate them into broader narratives of inclusive employment, particularly within nonprofit and faith-based institutions in the Global South (Hossain, 2025).Therefore, this study addresses a critical research gap by analyzing how public relations strategies through the RACE framework support inclusive employment in the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program. By focusing on PR as a strategic and communicative process, this research contributes to international debates on disability inclusion, service-sector employment, and the role of communication in advancing equitable labor practices.

Research Methods:-
Research Design and Approach:-
This study adopts a qualitative research designwith acase study approach to examine public relations strategies for inclusive employment implemented in the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program by BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research seeks to explore meanings, practices, interactions, and interpretations related to inclusive communication and employment from the perspectives of organizational actors, employees with disabilities, and service users. Rather than measuring causal relationships or testing hypotheses, this study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of how inclusive employment is strategically constructed, communicated, and evaluated within a specific organizational and social context.

The research is grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as socially produced through interaction, communication, and shared interpretation. Inclusive employment, within this paradigm, is understood not merely as a policy outcome but as a communicative and organizational process shaped by values, narratives, and everyday practices. This paradigm allows the researcher to capture how public relations strategies contribute to the social construction of disability inclusion in the workplace.

Case Selection and Research Context:-
The Difabis Coffee and Tea Program was selected as a single instrumental case because it represents a distinctive model of inclusive employment embedded within a faith-based social finance institution. Operated under BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta, the program integrates disability-inclusive employment with zakat-based empowerment, positioning work as both an economic activity and a form of social justice. The program employs deaf workers as baristas and service staff while actively promoting inclusive communication practices, including the use of Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO) and visual communication tools.

This case is particularly relevant because it operates within the service and hospitality sector, where communication and customer interaction are central to organizational performance and public perception. The setting thus provides a rich empirical site to explore how public relations strategies mediate interactions between the organization, employees with disabilities, and the broader public.

Unit of Analysis:-
The primary unit of analysis in this study is the public relations strategy of BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta as manifested through the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program. This includes planning processes, communication practices, stakeholder engagement, and evaluation mechanisms. Secondary units of analysis include (1) inclusive communication practices in service encounters, (2) employee experiences of inclusive employment, and (3) public responses to inclusive narratives and interactions.

Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques:-
Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and triangulation:
1. In-depth Interviews
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected informants, including:
- Internal stakeholders from BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta involved in program planning and communication,
- Deaf baristas participating in the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program, and Non-disabled customers who interacted directly with the program in the service environment.

The interviews explored perceptions of inclusive employment, communication practices, organizational intentions, and perceived impacts of the program. Semi-structured guides were used to allow flexibility while maintaining alignment with the RACE framework.

Participant Observation:-
The researcher conducted non-intrusive participant observation at the Difabis Coffee and Tea location to examine everyday interactions between baristas, customers, and management. Observation focused on communication modes, service encounters, customer responses, and the practical enactment of inclusion in the workplace. Field notes were systematically recorded to capture both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Document Analysis:-
Relevant organizational documents were analyzed, including program reports, internal guidelines, social media content, promotional materials, and public statements related to Difabis Coffee and Tea. These documents provided insight into how inclusive employment is framed and communicated at the institutional level.

Sampling Strategy:-
The study employed purposive sampling, selecting informants based on their relevance to the research objectives and their direct involvement with the program. This strategy ensured that participants possessed experiential knowledge of inclusive employment and communication practices. Sampling continued until thematic saturation was reached, indicated by the repetition of themes and no emergence of substantively new insights.

Data Analysis Procedure:-
Data analysis followed an interactive and iterative process, drawing on the qualitative analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña.

The process involved three main stages:
1. Data Reduction:-
Interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were systematically coded to identify relevant concepts related to public relations strategies, inclusive communication, and employment practices. Initial open coding was used to capture emerging themes, followed by focused coding aligned with the RACE framework.

2. Data Display:-
Coded data were organized into thematic matrices and narrative summaries to facilitate comparison across data sources. Displays were structured around the four dimensions of the RACE model: Research, Action, Communication, and Evaluation.

3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification:-
Patterns and relationships among themes were interpreted to construct analytical narratives explaining how PR strategies support inclusive employment. Conclusions were continuously verified through cross-checking data sources and revisiting field notes to ensure analytical rigor.

Analytical Framework:-
The RACE model (Research, Action, Communication, Evaluation) was used as the primary analytical framework. Each stage of the model served as an interpretive lens to examine how public relations strategies were designed, implemented, communicated, and assessed within the program. This framework enabled a structured yet flexible analysis that connected empirical findings to established PR theory.

Trustworthiness and Research Rigor:-
To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed:
1. Triangulation, by combining interviews, observation, and document analysis;
2. Source triangulation, involving multiple categories of informants;
3. Prolonged engagement, in the research setting to enhance contextual understanding; and
4. Audit trails, including detailed documentation of data collection and analysis decisions.

Ethical Considerations:-
Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing personal identifiers. Special attention was given to ethical sensitivity when engaging with participants with disabilities, ensuring accessibility, respect, and voluntary participation. The study was conducted with the approval and cooperation of the host organization.

Research Results and Discussion:-

This section presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study based on field data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The findings are organized according to the RACE framework (Research, Action, Communication, Evaluation) to illustrate how public relations strategies for inclusive employment are designed and enacted in the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program by BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta. The discussion integrates empirical evidence with relevant theoretical perspectives on inclusive employment, service communication, and public relations.

Research: Identifying Social Needs and Stakeholder Contexts:-

The findings indicate that the research phase of the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program was conducted primarily through contextual and experiential assessment, rather than formal quantitative surveys. Organizational actors described an internal process of recognizing the limited employment opportunities available to deaf individuals, particularly in service-sector jobs that require intensive interaction with customers. This awareness emerged from direct engagement with disability communities, internal discussions within BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta, and reflections on the social mandate of zakat-based empowerment.

Field interviews reveal that the organization framed inclusive employment not merely as labor absorption but as asocial justice issue, emphasizing dignity, independence, and equal participation. Observational data further show that this problem definition shaped subsequent strategic decisions, including the choice of the café as a public-facing employment model. This approach aligns with the RACE model's emphasis on research as a process of understanding social realities and stakeholder expectations, even when conducted informally but reflexively.From a public relations perspective, this stage demonstrates how social listening and contextualawarenessfunction as foundational elements of strategic communication. Rather than positioning disability inclusion as a reputational tactic, the organization grounded its strategy in perceived social needs, thereby enhancing legitimacy and stakeholder trust.

Action: Implementing Inclusive Employment Practices:-

The action phase materialized through the operational implementation of the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program, where deaf individuals were employed as baristas and service staff. Empirical findings show that inclusion was enacted through active participation in daily operations, not limited to symbolic representation. Baristas were involved in beverage preparation, customer service, and routine workplace responsibilities, indicating a shift from charity-based assistance to empowerment-oriented employment.

Interview data from deaf employees highlight a strong sense of professional identity and recognition. Participants expressed that their work was valued based on performance and customer satisfaction rather than disability status. Observational evidence supports this claim, showing standardized work procedures applied equally to all staff, with accommodations embedded into workflow design rather than treated as exceptions.

This stage reflects the transformation of inclusive employment into organizational practice, where action is aligned with values identified during the research phase. In PR terms, action functions as a credibility anchor: inclusive narratives communicated externally are substantiated by internal practices that can be observed and experienced by stakeholders.

Communication: Inclusive and Dialogic Interaction:-

Communication emerged as the core dimension of the program's public relations strategy. The findings demonstrate that inclusive communication operated on two interconnected levels: interpersonal communication in service encountersandmediated communication through digital platforms.

At the interpersonal level, the consistent use of Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO), visual menus, and gestural communication facilitated interaction between deaf baristas and non-disabled customers. Observations indicate that initial communication barriers often evolved into moments of engagement and learning, with customers adapting their communication styles and expressing curiosity rather than discomfort. This process transformed routine service encounters into educational and relational experiences**.**

At the mediated level, organizational social media content emphasized storytelling, highlighting the lived experiences of deaf baristas and framing the café as an inclusive social space. Document analysis shows that

narratives avoided pity-based framing and instead emphasized professionalism, competence, and collaboration. This narrative strategy contributed to reshaping public perceptions of disability from dependency to capability.From a theoretical standpoint, these findings support the model of two-way symmetrical communication, where dialogue and mutual adaptation foster understanding and legitimacy. Communication thus functioned not only as information dissemination but as a mechanism for social meaning-making.

Evaluation: Participatory Feedback and Reflective Learning:-
The evaluation phase was characterized byinformal yet continuous feedback mechanisms involving employees, customers, and organizational managers. Interviews reveal that feedback was primarily collected through daily interactions, direct conversations, and monitoring customer responses, rather than through standardized evaluation instruments.

Deaf employees reported that their input regarding workflow, communication tools, and service design was acknowledged and, in several cases, implemented. Customers similarly expressed that the organization was open to suggestions and responsive to concerns. This participatory evaluation approach reinforced a sense of shared ownership and accountability among stakeholders.

Although the evaluation process lacked formal metrics, it functioned effectively as a reflectivelearning mechanism, allowing the organization to adjust communication strategies and operational practices. Within the RACE framework, this demonstrates that evaluation need not be exclusively quantitative to be meaningful, particularly in socially embedded programs where relational outcomes are central.

Table 1. Summary of Findings Based on the RACE Framework

RACE Dimension	Empirical Findings	Public Relations Implications
Research	Identification of limited job access for deaf individuals through contextual observation and internal reflection	Research as social listening and legitimacy-building
Action	Employment of deaf baristas in full operational roles with embedded accommodations	Action as credibility and value enactment
Communication	Use of BISINDO, visual tools, and narrative storytelling across service and digital platforms	Communication as dialogic, educational, and meaning-making
Evaluation	Informal, participatory feedback from employees and customers	Evaluation as reflective and adaptive learning

Integrated Discussion:-
Overall, the findings demonstrate that public relations strategies in the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program function as an integrated system rather than discrete activities. Research informs action, action legitimizes communication, and communication generates feedback that feeds into evaluation. This cyclical process reinforces the RACE model as a practical framework for inclusive employment initiatives.Importantly, the study reveals that inclusive employment in service settings is sustained not only by policy or goodwill but by strategic communication practices that normalize difference and foster interaction. By embedding inclusion into everyday service encounters and organizational narratives, BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta transforms inclusive employment from a programmatic intervention into a shared social experience.These findings contribute to the broader literature by illustrating how public relations can operate as a mechanism of social transformation, particularly in nonprofit and faith-based organizational contexts where moral values, public trust, and social impact intersect.

Conclusion:-
This study demonstrates that public relations strategies play a critical role in enabling inclusive employment when they are designed as an integrated, value-driven process rather than as a promotional function. Through the application of the RACE framework, the Difabis Coffee and Tea Program by BAZNAS BAZIS Jakarta illustrates how inclusive employment can be grounded in contextual research, enacted through concrete organizational practices, communicated through dialogic and inclusive interactions, and sustained through participatory evaluation. The findings indicate that inclusive employment in service-sector settings is not achieved solely through hiring policies, but through the continuous alignment of organizational values, communication practices, and everyday workplace interactions.

Empirically, the study shows that inclusive communication particularly the use of Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO), visual communication tools, and narrative storytelling functions as a mechanism that transforms service encounters into spaces of mutual learning and social engagement. By positioning employees with disabilities as competent professionals rather than as beneficiaries of charity, the program contributes to reshaping public perceptions of disability and normalizing diversity in the workplace. The integration of inclusive employment with zakat-based social empowerment further highlights the potential of faith-based institutions to act as agents of social change through strategically managed communication and employment practices.Theoretically and practically, this research contributes to public relations and disability studies by demonstrating how the RACE model can be operationalized to support inclusive employment in nonprofit and service-oriented organizations. While the study is limited to a single case and relies primarily on qualitative data, it provides transferable insights for organizations seeking to embed inclusion into their communication strategies and operational routines. Future research is encouraged to incorporate comparative cases, longitudinal evaluation, and mixed-method approaches to assess long-term social and economic impacts of inclusive employment initiatives.

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