The Implementation of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) through Social Media in Handling Communication Crisis at Holywings

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Abstract

When launching a new product on social media, it is crucial to exercise caution and avoid using elements related to religion, ethnicity, or respected cultures in promotional activities. Unfortunately, Holywings overlooked this aspect of supervision, leading to a communication crisis that had to be dealt with. The purpose of this research was to understand the process of handling the communication crisis that occurred on Holywings' social media platforms. Based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this study examined the effectiveness of the crisis process, following the crisis stages outlined by W. Timothy Coombs. The process was divided into three phases: pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis. The research methodology employed was qualitative research using literature review. The findings of the study indicated that Holywings failed to anticipate potential risks and conducted insufficient analysis of the sensitivity of the names used in the promotion. The management of Holywings was also unprepared to handle the communication crisis on social media. Inappropriate handling resulted in significant losses. This crisis had detrimental effects on Holywings, such as the revocation of Holywings' permit leading to its closure by the Jakarta Provincial Government, as well as intangible losses like reputation and public trust.

Keywords: Crisis; Holywings; Promotion; Social Media

Introduction

The emergence of new media and social media has transformed the way public relations (PR) practitioners think and carry out their practices. By harnessing the potential of social media, PR practices have become more global, strategic, interactive, symmetrical or dialogic, and socially responsible. This indicates that in this new era, social media can be considered as one of the essential tools in PR strategies to communicate with the public (Prastya, 2011). The tasks and responsibilities of PR professionals now require them to be more cautious in formulating strategies, communicating, and disseminating information. In this era, the challenges have become significant with the accompanied advancements in technology. The rapid spread of news through social media forces PR practitioners to be responsive and adept at managing and mitigating public issues. The circulation of information can be a double-edged sword, affecting individuals or organizations and potentially leading to prolonged crises that impact revenue (Nova, 2017).
In the era of social media, crises have the ability to spread rapidly and without time constraints. Within minutes, information can reach various users and the general public. The impact of crises is also greater in this digital era, especially in terms of the reputation of organizations affected by crises. People can quickly respond to a case and have a larger impact on the organization. In the context of companies, new media such as social media have caused a shift in crisis communication management. This is due to the higher speed and uncertainty of information, as well as the increased prevalence of rumors in this digital era. Therefore, companies must be prepared to face crises with appropriate and responsive communication strategies, taking into account various sources of information and public opinion in managing such crises (Iswara Khairy Siregar, 2021). Social media is widely used as a communication medium in crisis resolution. However, its usage is not always smooth, as PR practitioners should understand the nature of the media and its target audience. Many companies have successfully utilized social media as a platform for disseminating information during crises. However, there are also cases where attempts to address issues through social media backfire and result in negative repercussions for the company.

Social media has had a significant impact on the practice of public relations, and PR practitioners need to continually adapt and develop new strategies to better leverage the potential offered by digital technology. This will help improve the quality of communication and reputation management for the organizations or companies they represent. Additionally, social media allows PR practitioners to expand the reach of their publications and promotions, for example, by utilizing online platforms such as websites, blogs, or mobile applications. Furthermore, social media enables PR practitioners to more effectively and efficiently measure the performance of campaigns or programs. With a variety of tools and data analysis technologies available, PR practitioners can more easily gather and analyze consumer data and market trends, which can be used to enhance campaign quality and improve customer satisfaction. However, as social media continues to evolve, PR practitioners also need to exercise caution in selecting appropriate communication strategies and online reputation management. One of the challenges is ensuring that the information conveyed through social media is well-received by the public and does not give rise to misunderstandings or detrimental controversies.

Social media is a platform for information dissemination based on the internet, and its usage has transformed communication into interactive dialogue. On social media, users can easily connect with each other and engage in interactions, sharing, and participating in every post. Social media has become a widely used medium in society. Brogan (2010) stated that social media itself means a new tool for communication and collaboration that was previously unavailable for various purposes (Tongkotow Liedfray, 2022). However, according to Rulli (2017), social media is an online platform that allows users to represent themselves, interact, collaborate, share, and communicate with other users to build virtual social relationships (Ariandia, Fahlvi, & Mubarak, 2023). Based on these definitions, it can be emphasized that social media can be a place where active activities involve two-way interactions, such as information exchange, collaboration, and networking with other users. The development of social media has been rapid from year to year. The types of social media have also become diverse, and their usage can be tailored to the needs of the community.

According to Wasesa (2006:164), crisis communication can generally be described as a strategy to communicate what needs to be conveyed, what actions have been taken, and how an organization responds to a crisis (Silviani, 2020). Almost every company has experienced a crisis. Essentially, crises usually occur unexpectedly and often have the potential to threaten the survival of the company itself and its stakeholders. Crises cannot be predicted, let alone prepared for. They can affect anyone and all segments, such as companies, individuals, content creators, educational institutions, governments, and so on, for various reasons. A crisis does not discriminate whether a company is a startup or a large corporation. To ensure that a company is prepared to handle a crisis, it must have a well-prepared plan in place for when such a crisis occurs. In this era, a well-designed plan will facilitate the company in dealing
with the public and the media to mitigate or even resolve the crisis. Additionally, it can help maintain public trust in the company itself and related stakeholders. Crises are usually disseminated to the public through the media, so the media plays a key role in shaping the crisis. Nowadays, with the rapid spread of crises through social media, unverified information can easily circulate.

Coombs (2015) defines a crisis as an unexpected event that threatens the primary stakeholders' expectations and can seriously affect an organization's effectiveness, leading to negative outcomes. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, by categorizing crises as events, this study not only identifies the crisis by its direct name but also analyzes crisis variables such as the type of crisis and the timing of its occurrence, which are important dimensions for providing a holistic examination of the nature of the crisis. Secondly, using this widely used categorization allows for a clear division of the crisis into three stages for analysis: pre-crisis (signal detection, prevention, and preparation), crisis event (recognition and containment), and post-crisis (evaluation, learning, and communication of follow-up actions) (Cheng, 2018).

Essentially, crises do not occur out of the blue, as various crisis definitions explain that crises have a process for their occurrence. According to Steven Fik, as cited in Coombs (2010), who conducted a study on crises, it was concluded that crises have several stages known as the crisis development model. (1) Prodromal, the emergence of warning signs of an impending crisis. (2) Acute, the stage when the crisis occurs. (3) Chronic, the chronic recovery stage where remnants of the crisis still require caution. During this phase, the crisis event remains vivid in people's memories. (4) Crisis resolution, when the organization can resume normal activities (Kriyantono, 2018).

According to Coombs (2015), the stages of a crisis can be divided into three phases.

a. Pre-crisis in this Phase

The organization or government becomes aware of the emerging situation and realizes its seriousness. Members of the organization, both management and employees, are aware of the potential crisis. Before the crisis reaches its peak, it is advisable for the entire team within the organization to prepare themselves for the possibility of a crisis.

b. Crisis Event in this Phase

The crisis has already occurred, and the organization or government is unable to handle it well, resulting in the crisis spreading throughout the organization and the public. The organization must respond to the crisis quickly and effectively. Steps that can be taken include minimizing the impact of the crisis and organizing the crisis to prevent it from spreading widely.

c. Post-crisis in this Phase

The crisis has been resolved, and the organization or government needs to focus on recovery to restore the situation to its previous state or improve conditions after the crisis. The organization also needs to make efforts to maintain a positive image or prevent further damage to its reputation. The actions taken during this period will greatly determine whether an organization succeeds or fails in managing and overcoming the crisis.

Basically, every crisis has its own characteristics and requires varying approaches depending on the situation and type of crisis. Therefore, it is important to be well-prepared and have a well-thought-out crisis response plan in order to effectively face the crisis (Suharyanti, 2013). Based on Liu & Levenshus (2012) and Coombs (1995; 2010), there are four major categories of crisis response: denial, mitigation, rebuilding, and reinforcement. According to them, denial strategies are more suitable for addressing rumors or emerging issues. Meanwhile, crises resulting from accidents or past events are typically managed through mitigation strategies. Rebuilding strategies are commonly used to anticipate and address
crises. Reinforcement strategies involve providing compensation, issuing apologies, taking corrective actions, and offering benefits as efforts to resolve the crisis (Astri Wibawanti Putri, 2019).

Understanding crisis patterns can help a public relations practitioner anticipate emerging issues and respond effectively. Although each crisis is unique and develops in different ways, common patterns have been observed in most events. By dividing the crisis into several phases, a communicator can plan the information needs of the media, stakeholders, and the general public. Therefore, communication efforts should evolve according to each phase, which requires unique information needs (E Herovic, 2020).

The use of social media in communicating a crisis within a company can effectively accelerate its spread. In a crisis situation, time is crucial, and social media enables companies to provide the latest information quickly. The information conveyed by the company allows for transparency in order to restore and enhance public trust in the company. Apart from being expected to report the current conditions of the crisis-exposed company quickly and transparently, companies also require support. In a crisis situation, public support is indeed vital. Social media serves as a platform for interaction between the company and the public in seeking their support. Typically, during a crisis, there is a lot of uncertain information circulating. Social media can also assist companies in addressing and refuting incorrect or inaccurate information that may arise during the crisis. However, many companies have failed to effectively utilize social media to handle crises, resulting in the dissemination of information that damages the company's image. The use of social media now presents its own challenges and will undoubtedly be advantageous for companies that use it successfully and appropriately. The use of social media in a crisis entails challenges and benefits that need to be considered.

An example of such a situation occurred at Holywings Indonesia, an entertainment industry company. The crisis at Holywings began on June 22, 2022, with a campaign for a free alcoholic beverage promotion by offering free drinks to its customers named Muhammad and Maria through Instagram. The promotion was posted on Holywings' official social media accounts. The post featured images of two types of drinks and the caption, "Looking for Muhammad and Maria, we'll give you Gordon's Dry Gin or Gordon's Pink for free. Never Stop Flying." With the caption, "TELL MUHAMMAD AND MARIA TO COME TO HOLYWINGS NOW!" the post went viral. The promotion was deemed offensive to two sacred names in Islam and Christianity. Muhammad is the name of the last Prophet in Islam, while Maria is the name of Jesus' mother. After the promotion stirred public unrest and received criticism from various parties on social media, Holywings promptly issued an apology on June 23, 2023, to the offended community, acknowledging that it was perceived as an act of religious blasphemy (Arfiansyah, 2022).

Several previous researchers have examined the analysis of social media regarding the Holywings crisis, focusing on different aspects. For example, Aji and Arianto (2023) conducted a study on the analysis of Holywings' communication network to map the communication network formed when the company faced a PR crisis in the promotion of Muhammad Maria on Twitter. Widjaja and Towpek (2023) also researched the Holywings case and its existence from the perspective of Indonesian law and social politics. Additionally, Goce (2023) examined corporate criminal liability in cases of religious blasphemy through Holywings' social media.

This study is a case study of situational communication on social media during the communication crisis in the entertainment industry of Holywings Indonesia. Unlike previous research, this study provides novelty by focusing on crisis management conducted on Holywings' social media. Previous studies have mostly explored social media networks and legal perspectives in handling cases of religious blasphemy that occurred at Holywings.
Theory

PR practitioners can use the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as a fundamental guideline in developing communication strategies during crisis situations. These conditions can occur in the pre-crisis, crisis, or post-crisis stages. The theory explains that meeting public expectations leads to a positive organizational reputation. Therefore, if an organization already has a good reputation, it means that the organization has legitimacy in society. Legitimacy refers to the right that an organization has to carry out its daily operations and exist. SCCT is a theory that describes how organizations can effectively respond to emerging crises in a way that minimizes their negative impact. It was developed by W. Timothy Coombs in 1995, who stated that humans tend to seek causes or attributions for events, especially negative and unexpected ones (Kriyantono, 2018).

SCCT focuses on how public relations professionals can assess the level of reputational threat to an organization due to a crisis. The theory identifies two types of crisis response strategies: primary crisis response strategies and additional crisis response strategies. It is one of the most widely used theories in the field of crisis communication. SCCT emphasizes the importance of understanding the crisis situation, including crisis characteristics, stakeholder perceptions, and the organization's level of responsibility for the crisis (whether it has a positive or negative impact) (Syukron, 2021). Based on this understanding, organizations can design effective communication messages to address the crisis and restore their reputation. The primary crisis response strategies consist of three groups based on perceptions of accepting responsibility for the crisis. Organizational reputation is a critical concept that receives primary attention in SCCT. The theory also identifies communication strategies that organizations can use to manage crises, such as denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering. In practice, SCCT has proven to help organizations manage crises more effectively and improve their reputation (Coombs, 2009).

The implementation of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is as follows:

1. Rapid and transparent response: Organizations should respond to crises quickly and openly, providing accurate and clear information about the situation. This will help reduce speculation and concerns from stakeholders.
2. Understanding the characteristics of the crisis: Organizations must understand the characteristics of the crisis and how it impacts stakeholder perceptions. In this regard, organizations should conduct risk analysis and pay attention to stakeholder sensitivities in managing the crisis.
3. Identification of stakeholders and their interests: Organizations should identify stakeholders related to the crisis and understand their interests in the situation. By doing so, organizations can develop appropriate communication messages for each stakeholder and minimize negative impacts on their reputation.
4. Use of appropriate communication strategies: Organizations should choose the appropriate communication strategy, such as denial, diminishment, rebuilding, or bolstering, based on the characteristics of the crisis and stakeholder perceptions. Organizations should also develop consistent and easily understandable communication messages for stakeholders.
5. Evaluation of the impact of the crisis: Organizations should continuously evaluate the impact of the crisis to ensure that the communication strategies used are effective in improving their reputation. This can also help organizations improve their crisis management in the future.

Methodology

In this study, the author utilized the literature review research method. The author employed a narrative review model, where data obtained from several journals were reviewed by the author. The research method used was qualitative research, and the data source utilized was secondary data obtained from various international journals, articles, and previous studies that were reviewed by the author.
pertaining to the issue being examined in this research. The researcher employed a descriptive analytical method by collecting, preparing, and analyzing the researched data.

**Result and Discussion**

Many companies have successfully utilized social media as an information medium in crisis management. The use of social media can help dampen issues and calm the public during crises. However, this may not be the case for all companies using the same strategies. One company that failed to handle a crisis using social media is Holywings. It all began with a promotion conducted by Holywings on the Instagram social media platform. The post triggered public perception that the naming of the promotion was an act of religious blasphemy.

The post featured images of two types of beverages and the text "Looking for someone named Muhammad and Maria, we'll give you Gordon's Dry Gin or Gordon's Pink for free. Never Stop Flying." With a caption saying, "TELL MUHAMMAD AND MARIA TO COME TO HOLYWINGS NOW!", the post went viral. The promotion was considered disrespectful towards two sacred names in Islam and Christianity. Muhammad is the name of the last prophet in Islam, while Maria is the name of the mother of Jesus. After the promotion caused public unrest, criticism from various parties flooded social media. Following the incident's virality, Holywings promptly issued an apology on June 23, 2023, to the individuals who felt hurt and considered it an act of religious blasphemy.

**Crisis Management Based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

Essentially, when creating a promotional campaign with sensitive information, Holywings management should have been able to predict the potential risks. When launching a new product, it is crucial to be cautious and avoid using elements related to religion, ethnicity, or culture that could be considered sensitive or respected. Therefore, the promotion could have been altered by using a different name as the subject. This phase falls under the pre-crisis stage, which can be handled and analyzed beforehand. However, due to the lack of consideration for the sensitivity of the names used, the promotion instead turned into a crisis for Holywings. The unpreparedness of the management in handling
the crisis exacerbated public concerns and issues. When the crisis occurred and the post went viral, Holywings immediately realized the public’s unrest. Holywings promptly removed the promotional post and uploaded an apology. Assessing the situation based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Holywings implemented several strategies. However, they were not fully effective in resolving the crisis. The understanding, analysis, and measurement of the impact of the crisis led to inadequate planning and implementation. The crisis, in fact, was addressed by Holywings through their response to the public crisis. Holywings immediately apologized through their official Instagram account as an initial response. The apology stated that the management was unaware of the promotion, causing further unrest and a loss of trust from the public. The information was perceived as not being transparent, clear, or accurate regarding the situation that had unfolded. As a result, this information led to speculation and increased public concerns.

1. Pre-Crisis

In the initial stage of crisis management, the apology provided by Holywings proved to be insufficient in strengthening the crisis response that had already occurred. Referring to the crisis strategies implemented, it is felt that they were inadequate, and as a result, the action plan designed to assist Holywings in dealing with the crisis that had damaged its reputation was still ineffective. Upon further examination of the crisis management, Holywings started by addressing the public’s concerns by removing the promotional post. However, it is unfortunate that the detailed information was not explained or transparently communicated regarding the authorization for creating the promotion. Holywings stated that the promotion was carried out by its employees without management's knowledge, leading to public speculation about the case. Many people assumed that the management should have been aware of every promotion, considering it was used in all branches of Holywings. These assumptions and speculations became uncontrollable, and they were expressed on Holywings' official social media platforms, including Instagram and Twitter. There was a significant amount of public interaction on Holywings' social media platforms, where the company and its management were criticized. The negative comments eroded Holywings’ image and diminished public trust.

2. Crisis

The Holywings case has created a snowball effect crisis, as its spread through social media has been so fast that the problem has only grown bigger. The numerous condemnations from the public, politicians, and other parties have led to the case being handed over to the police for investigation and firm action, along with imposing sanctions. The crisis deepened when Holywings management stated that the irresponsibility was not their responsibility. This was reinforced by the management's claim of ignorance and the identification of six suspects from the Holywings creative team. The communication strategy employed to maintain Holywings' positive image by shifting the blame to the staff involved did not restore public trust. Throughout this case, the public extensively discussed and spread the posts and news related to it. However, Holywings neglected to contain the already massive spread, including reposting deleted posts, expressing support for the implicated staff members, and, worst of all, having their license revoked by the Jakarta Provincial Government (Goce, 2023).

In this case, the six staff members became suspects after being reported by Budi, who felt his interests were violated due to the promotion of an alcoholic beverage using a religious figure's name. If Holywings management were to apologize on behalf of the company and impose sanctions on their staff, it could reduce speculation and public distrust. However, Holywings denied their responsibility in this matter. The negative impact of this case became inevitable. Through the legal process, the six Holywings creative team members were found guilty, leading to the formation of a negative image. As a result of this crisis, Holywings had to close several branches in various cities, causing losses for the entire management and stakeholders, and leaving 3,000 staff members unemployed.
3. Pasca-Crisis

Holywings is considered by many to evade responsibility or blame its employees for the promotion crisis. Many believe that resolving a crisis on social media should have been easier for the company, as they could have easily addressed the spreading issue. However, Holywings failed to conduct adequate research for their promotional activities, and using religion as the basis for promotion was a serious mistake. According to data from the Setara Institute, there were 97 cases of religious defamation between 1965 and 2017. Holywings should take full responsibility in addressing this crisis. They should not just blame the employees involved but also acknowledge the company's mistakes in planning, overseeing, and evaluating the promotional activities. Holywings must communicate effectively with their employees and the public during the crisis, using social media and other communication channels to explain the actions taken and apologize to the public.

Holywings also needs to enhance the training and understanding of their employees regarding ethics, cultural sensitivity, and religion. This will help prevent similar mistakes from happening in the future and strengthen their understanding of the social and religious context in which the company operates. Better research and oversight are also necessary. Holywings should conduct more in-depth research on their audience, the risks associated with the messages conveyed, and the use of religious symbols in marketing. In this regard, collaboration with external parties such as relevant institutions or experts can help improve their understanding of sensitive religious issues. Data from the Setara Institute shows that religious defamation is a serious issue. Therefore, companies like Holywings must exercise great caution when using religion as the basis for their promotions. Understanding the social context, laws, and cultural sensitivities is crucial to avoiding controversy and building positive relationships with the public. Companies must ethically take responsibility for their marketing activities to avoid fatal mistakes that can harm their reputation (Aji & Arianto, 2023).

In the post-crisis stage experienced by Holywings, the company's legitimacy was compromised, leading to the closure of its business and the disruption of its operations. This resulted in significant losses for the management and stakeholders. The losses incurred were substantial, both in terms of material aspects such as the company's revenue and immaterial aspects such as the public's perception and trust in Holywings, as well as the fear among the public regarding potential future staff members. The crisis management efforts by Holywings were tailored to the media channels through which the crisis spread, but the communication and actions taken were perceived as inadequate in meeting the organization's interests and failed to meet the public's expectations. This incident will undoubtedly serve as an evaluation for Holywings' stakeholders in considering similar types of business ventures in the future.

Conclusions

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that communication crises on social media can occur in companies at any time and can pose a serious threat to the company's reputation. Prompt and appropriate response to social media communication crises can help companies overcome the crisis and maintain their reputation. In this study, it was found to what extent the preparation and handling of communication crises through social media occurred in Holywings.

The crisis management implemented was not optimal due to several issues that were not properly addressed by Holywings, resulting in the rapid escalation of the crisis. Holywings faced a crisis caused by the insensitive use of religious elements in the promotion of a new product. The company failed to anticipate potential risks and conducted insufficient analysis of the sensitivity of the names used in the promotion. The lack of preparation by the management in handling the crisis further increased public concerns. This crisis had detrimental effects on Holywings, including both material and immaterial losses.
such as reputation and public trust. The closure of Holywings' business also resulted in significant losses for the management and stakeholders. The mishandling of this crisis should serve as an evaluation for Holywings' stakeholders in similar future business ventures.

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