

CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF A STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISE: A TEXT ANALYSIS OF NEWS PORTAL REPORT DURING MBZ ELEVATED TOLL ROAD CONTROVERSIES

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ABSTRACT

This research studies the crisis communication strategies that PT Jasa Marga Persero used during the time of crisis regarding MBZ Elevated Toll Road. Jasa Marga was faced with threats which are very harmful for their reputation because the issue is related to their infrastructure quality, technical failures, and corruption allegations. These crises put Jasa Marga in a high-responsibility context. This research uses a qualitative content analysis approach, analyzing crisis-related communications derived from official press releases and credible Indonesian online news platforms. Guiding the research approach, this research analyzed its data using Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Restoration Theory (IRT), supported by a coding matrix and meaning-making framework to interpret communication patterns, rhetorical strategies, and attribution of responsibility.

Jasa Marga used a combination of SCCT, and IRT strategies in their crisis communication, depending on the nature of the crisis. Additionally, communication patterns reveal a tendency to shift blame, minimize severity, and emphasize institutional credibility through reminders of good governance practices. Jasa Marga also shows some limitations in maintaining a long-term trust. This is because there was an inconsistency in transparent communication and stakeholder engagement. This study contributes to the understanding of crisis communication in state-owned enterprises, particularly in infrastructure-related controversies in a digital public environment.

Key Words: Crisis Communication, Jasa Marga, MBZ Elevated Toll Road, State-Owned Enterprise, SCCT, IRT

Background

PT Jasa Marga (Persero) TBK is the leading and a strategic state-owned toll road operator in Indonesia. One of Jasa Marga's most ambitious and widely discussed projects is the Jakarta - Cikampek II Elevated Toll Road, later renamed the MBZ Elevated Toll Road in 2021. Constructed from 2017 until 2019, this 36.4-kilometer elevated toll road was intended to reduce congestion on Jakarta - Cikampek dense traffic and serve the rapidly expanding industrial area, just east of Jakarta. The elevated toll road is recently connected with many accidents and user losses connected not only to random incidents, but directly connected to the physical characteristics and conditions of the infrastructure.

Other than operational accidents, experts and engineering observers publicly questioned the construction quality of MBZ. Several people using independent journalism pointed out potential drawbacks in material quality of the road. This includes concrete that allegedly did not meet required national standards and warned that parts of the structure might not reach the intended standard. This results in the discomfort

of driving while cruising on the elevated toll road. Jasa Marga also received allegations regarding development fundings being corrupted by the developer, improper reductions in project volume, and manipulation of construction specifications. The allegations were further investigated by the company PT Tridi Membran Utama. In the court room discoursing the issue, the director of the company, Andi Widjaja stated that in the timeframe of six months, they have sampled 75 types of concrete, and find a significant amount of substandard hard concrete material (Kamil & Krisandi, 2024).

Transparency, trust, and responsiveness are the main survival factors of any enterprise. Negative word-of-mouth from the people, failure to respond to a crisis, and a lack of transparency can swiftly affect the reputation of the organization. Therefore, it is necessary that any owners of business enterprises should always be prepared to maintain the reputation of their enterprise among their stakeholders (Bracey, 2013).

William Benoit (1997) created a concept of Image restoration called Image Restoration Theory. In his research he quoted “If the firm is not really to blame for the offensive act, this can be an important component of its response. As long as the audience thinks the firm is at fault, the image is at risk.”. The audience isn’t only a spectator in this day and age for businesses. They also act like a judge, especially for the reputation of a state-owned enterprise like PT Jasa Marga. We can see an example of this happening from Figure 2, where MBZ users show their emotion through their platform about their experience on MBZ. There are many other users that show their disappointment about their experience cruising on MBZ. This is a direct threat to the company reputation. Looking at how Jasa Marga handled and response to those mentioned crises from a communication perspective became a highly relevant research topic. But a solid research question must be asserted. How will the news media report Jasa Marga’s crisis communication, and what type of crisis communication did the media quoted from Jasa Marga? How would the researcher find these?

Objective

It is still vague how a state-owned enterprise such as Jasa Marga tackle and handle issues they face from a communication standpoint. Analyzing how their strategies are linguistically, and narratively constructed across PT Jasa Marga’s official communication materials, such as public statements, press releases, or other media that covers the controversies could enlighten us more about how a state-owned enterprise moves during the time of crisis.

Conceptual Framework

Crisis response strategies are specific communication actions or messages used to manage stakeholder trust and mitigate reputational damage. As defined in the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), these strategies include the actions of ‘Deny’, ‘Diminish’, ‘Rebuild’, and ‘Bolster’, each selected according to the type of crisis and perceived organizational responsibility (Coombs, 2007).

This research includes two theories for its development. One main

theory, in this case SCCT, and a supporting theory, Image Restoration Theory (IRT). The reason IRT is used in this research is because IRT emphasizes the rhetorical and communicative techniques used to repair organizational image following reputational damage. IRT complements SCCT by offering a deeper understanding of how crisis response strategies are articulated in PT Jasa Marga's official statements and communications. While SCCT identifies the overarching strategy cluster, IRT helps interpret the rhetorical techniques embedded within those strategies.

Research Method

This research uses a qualitative study design. Qualitative study design explores and gives deeper insights into real world problems. Qualitative research asks open-ended questions where answers are not easily put into numbers, such as "how" and "why". (Tenny et al., 2022). The reason why a qualitative study is suitable for Jasa Marga's MBZ cases is because the case explores phenomena such as experiences, attitudes, and behaviors. To add to that, a content analysis design enables the research to be analyzed

within its real-life context, combining text, media, and institutional perspectives.

Although a very resourceful media, there are hundreds of media outlets that report local crises every single day. This leads to an overflowing of information, and this type of situation can sometimes lead to false news or ambiguous information. Thus, the news outlet that will be the source of information in this research will be according to a statistic released by goodstats.id, 10 most trusted Indonesian media in 2025 (Shahibah A, 2025). To make the search equal and 'apple to apple', certain key words will be put on the search bar of every news portal. The key words used to search the data will be the same for each portal. Three main cases will be the crisis chosen for this research, that is the corruption case of MBZ, Infrastructure quality concerns that is tightly related to the corruption case, and the most well-known accident happened on MBZ, which is the 21 wheel rupture on MBZ. "*Kasus Korupsi MBZ*", "*Kualitas Beton MBZ*", "*21 Ban Pecah di MBZ*" will be the key words for each case respectively, as it covers the

issue topics very well.

After all of the news report has been displayed, comes the next step of research, which is data condensation. Each and every form of narrative and direct quotation found, which comes directly from the representative of Jasa Marga will be categorized using a code that will be later determined in the research. The code in mind represents the detail and information that the research could absorb. For this research, all data will be placed, categorized, and explained in a spreadsheet. The last stem of the research is to decide and take conclusions from the analysis. The conclusion will be Jasa Marga's pattern of crisis communication during the MBZ controversies.

Findings and Discussion

The data set analyzed for this research comprises seven distinct crisis events involving Jasa Marga and the MBZ Elevated Toll Road between late 2023 and mid-2024. These crises are not uniform. They range from structural integrity allegations and legal corruption to operational technical failures (tire punctures). This diversity in crisis types

requires a multifaceted communication approach, which Jasa Marga attempted to navigate through various different spokespersons and media channels.

Based on the collected data in the dataset, a combination of 'rebuild', 'diminish', and 'bolster' strategies are constantly used. Although, the uses of each strategy depend on the nature and situation severity of each crisis. For example, in corruption related cases, the organization shows a tendency toward 'rebuild' strategies, more specifically through cooperative legal statements and reaffirmation of governance principles. This shows Jasa Marga has an acknowledgment of reputational threat and is attempting to restore stakeholder trust throughout the crisis.

Jasa Marga adopts their defensive strategy, specifically through the 'diminish' strategy can be explained through the organizations need to protect organizational legitimacy and reduce reputational threat. Based on SCCT, when organizations perceive that stakeholders may attribute responsibility to them, they often attempt to minimize perceived accountability to prevent

reputational damage (Coombs, 2013). In this case, it is more emphasized because the case includes Jasa Marga as a state-owned enterprise, and their high connection to the government, and therefore their overall service. By framing crises as technical or situational issues, Jasa Marga is able to control the narrative, reduce blame intensity, and maintain stakeholder confidence in its operational competence.

In the previous chapter, the news portals have been discussed quite thoroughly. The choices of the news portal, the reason why some infamous news portal like Kompas.com did not make it to the dataset, and many more. However, the previous chapter has not assessed the time span, and the phase of each crisis. A critical finding in the dataset is that Jasa Marga's communication almost exclusively occurs during the "Peak" phase of the crisis. This phase can be categorized by the intense media coverage, heightened public attention, and strong stakeholder reactions.

From the theoretical perspective, choosing a proper spokesperson plays an

important role in forming stakeholders' perceptions during the crisis communications process. According to research conducted by Jamilah (2016), it has been found that credibility of spokespersons such as expertise, trustworthiness, and clarity affects crisis communication process positively. In this case, acting as a member of the corporate communication division, Lisye Octaviana serves as a credible source and has control over the process of conveying the information. Moreover, according to Coombs (2010), some companies choose not to use a CEO and opt for professionals to ensure consistent messages during the crisis communication process.

All aspects of the SCCT strategy were employed in the dataset of this study. This is not meant to imply that Jasa Marga has not been consistent with their strategy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Each issue involving MBZ put Jasa Marga in a unique position each time, without forgetting that a different person would address the crisis in a different environment. As for the problem with MBZ Elevated Toll Road, especially the issues related to the

structural quality of the infrastructure, the majority of the strategies applied by Jasa Marga are the use of the 'Diminish' technique. The decision of Jasa Marga to adopt the 'Diminish' strategy in addressing the crisis is in line with what the SCCT theory suggests as the right response in crisis situations where the organization believes that the crisis happened due to some reasons outside its control. In dealing with the problem related to the quality of the infrastructure, the discourse of Jasa Marga often involved elements of what Benoit refers to as the 'Evasion of Responsibility'.

This is one of the most interesting findings in this research. The finding came from the case of tire rupture incidents on MBZ. Basically, while Jasa Marga outwardly adopted a 'Rebuild' strategy by offering compensation to victims, the implementation of this offer was hindered or was made very complicated by significant administrative barriers. There is a more academic form of this event, it is Decoupling. To put it simply, decoupling is a scenario where an organization's "talk", or in this case

promises is vaguely connected or is outright disconnected from their "walk" (Contreras-Pacheco et al., 2021). In the case of Jasa Marga, they gave a 3x24 hour claim window and an extensive list of documents (police reports, authorized repair shop estimates, etc.). This requirement acts as a technical barrier between the victims of the incidents and the compensation that Jasa Marga offers.

Thus, Jasa Marga did gain their reputational benefit for being accommodative and disseminating the accommodative message. But on the other hand, the victims had difficulty getting the accommodation. This aligns with symbolic corrective action rather than substantive corrective action, allowing the company to maintain legitimacy without fully assuming the operational costs of the failure.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the analysis of seven distinct crisis events involving PT Jasa Marga and the MBZ Elevated Toll Road from late 2023 to mid 2024, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the company's crisis communication strategies:

1. Jasa Marga did not rely on the same, uniform pattern of crisis communication. Instead, they applied a more sophisticated mix of SCCT and IRT strategies, tailored to the specific nature and peak of each crisis.
2. Tendency toward the use of 'Rebuild' and 'Diminish' communication strategy. Both the most common were used, 'Rebuild' (4 times) and 'Diminish' (3 times). It means that the company really tried to apologize and restore its image, especially in situations where it was 'Preventable'. Therefore, in most cases, Jasa Marga admitted their mistakes and did not try to deny them.
3. Combination strategies (such as using 'Rebuild' and 'Bolster' for accusations of corruption and 'Denial' and 'Diminish' in a courtroom setting) to increase the effect of management of their reputation. Still, it is connected with the 'not rely on one pattern of communication' statement.
4. Media quotations were considered the most efficient communication strategy. They were communicated mostly through press conference and press release, which are always very efficient. Lisye Octaviana who is a Head of Corporate Communication & Community Development Group acts as a constant spokesman.
5. Lastly, Jasa Marga always reply at the peak of the crises, thus showing that all of the crises were taken seriously. Despite operational problems that existed, professionalism on the part of Jasa Marga showed that they would never be late to share their official version of the story.

There seems to be grey area about the consequence of such crises on the stakeholders and the general public in terms of the current literature. Future studies should focus on the effects of implementing the strategies mentioned above on SOE's brand equity. Further study is needed to analyze how "Meaning-Making Features" specifically influence public perception

when technical infrastructure failures are framed through legalistic vs. empathetic lenses.

For major infrastructure operators like Jasa Marga, maintaining “*dukungan publik*” (public support) is essential. The company should prioritize transparent and educational communication regarding construction impacts and safety standards to maintain social trust and reduce the likelihood of viral backlash on digital platforms.

While a ‘multiple’ approach is useful, Jasa Marga should aim for a more consistent 'Rebuild' posture in technical failures to minimize negative stock returns and loss of investor trust. This can be done by showing visible and knowledgeable compensation strategies such as a simpler compensation claim procedure.

Utilizing and investing in social media would be practically beneficial for a state-owned enterprise like Jasa Marga. Social media could reach a very broad audience, even possibly future investors. A practical recommendation is to post frequent field conditions and

be present on social media in the middle of a crisis to minimize any misinformation.

And lastly, Utilizing and investing in social media would be practically beneficial for a state-owned enterprise like Jasa Marga. Social media could reach a very broad audience, even possibly future investors, and to not worsen the overall image of the company.

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