



Crisis Communication Strategy in Managing Complaints Related to Blackout Incidents at Pt Pln (Persero) UID S2JB

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ABSTRACT

This research was motivated by a blackout incident in the work area of PT PLN (Persero) UID S2JB which triggered various negative public complaints on social media and had the potential to reduce public trust in the company. Blackouts are not only a technical nuisance, but also develop into a communication crisis because the public needs fast, clear, and transparent information regarding the cause of the outage and the power restoration process. This study aims to find out the crisis communication strategy of PT PLN UID S2JB in handling complaints about blackout incidents and analyze how negative complaints can trigger a crisis of public trust. This study uses the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) theory from W. Timothy Coombs with a qualitative research method. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The research informant came from the public relations of PT PLN UID S2JB who was directly involved in handling the blackout crisis communication. The results of the study show that the crisis communication strategy of PT PLN UID S2JB is carried out through the pre-crisis, during crisis, and post-crisis phases. In the crisis phase, the company conveys blackout information through social media, regional stakeholders, and field service units and conducts social media sweeping to monitor public opinion. In the post-crisis phase, the company conducts network evaluation and maintenance as an effort to restore public trust. This research also shows that negative public complaints can develop into a crisis of public trust due to unclear information, delayed communication responses, and the development of negative opinions on social media. Therefore, crisis communication not only functions as an information delivery, but also plays an important role in maintaining the reputation and public trust in PT PLN (Persero) UID S2JB.

INTRODUCTION

Electrical energy is the heart of every community activity, from the household scale to large industries. When the flow of electricity distribution comes to a halt, the impact is not only on the loss of lighting, but also on the social and economic life of people who are heavily dependent on the daily supply of electricity. Electricity supply instability impacts jobs, education, and community communication connectivity, with the majority of respondents reporting significant disruptions in daily activities when power is unstable or goes out without prior notice (Ismiraj et al., 2025).

PT PLN (Persero) is a state-owned company that plays a vital role in providing electricity to all levels of Indonesian society. As the main support in the national electricity system, PT PLN is responsible for ensuring reliable and safe electricity availability. Therefore, the quality of service provided by PT PLN has a great influence on public perception, which ultimately affects the company's reputation and image in the eyes of the public. It is in this context that PT PLN is faced with a major challenge to continue to maintain the level of public trust in the services they provide.

PLN grew into a company with a giant network system whose resources could illuminate all corners of Indonesia. However, it is undeniable that companies with systems as sophisticated and as large as this can still experience technical problems. Like several cases that befell PT PLN, namely Blackout South Sumatra, Jambi, and

Bengkulu networks, and extends to Lampung, Bangka Belitung, Riau, and parts of North Sumatra. Blackout The Central Java Bagain network covers DKI Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, Banten, and parts of East Java(Choerunnisa & Nugraha, 2020). This technical problem has become a national issue because it has a bad impact on millions of citizens, transportation, and telecommunications.

In the work area of PT PLN (Persero) UID S2JB, the level of community dependence on electricity is classified as very high. This is reflected in the electrification ratio in South Sumatra province which has reached 99.02%, which shows that almost all households have access to electricity. Similar conditions are also shown in the Jambi and Bengkulu regions, which are generally in the category of high effectiveness ratio and close to 100% in line with the expansion of the electricity network by PLN (Baiduri, 2024).

Phenomenon Blackout or the total blackout that occurred in the work area of PT PLN (persero) of the South Sumatra, Jambi, and Bengkulu Distribution Unit (UID S2JB) became a crisis point that disrupted the stability of the region. Incidents Blackout This was raised in several news as quoted from Detiksumbagsel (2024), the Manager of Communications and Social and Environmental Responsibility said that the incident Blackout occurred on June 4, 2024 and was triggered by a disruption to Sumatra's interconnection transmission system such as the 275kV SUTET disruption in the Linggau-Lahat area which acts as the backbone of energy supply.

The blackout incident or mass power outage instantly triggered bad complaints to PLN UID S2JB, the public overflowed with disappointment on social media. These complaints appear massively through various social media such as X (Twitter) and TikTok. Some comments touched on information delays, alleged lack of readiness in handling the crisis, and harsh criticism that PLN UID S2JB was easy to act decisively to customers who were in arrears, but were considered unresponsive when people experienced power outages for hours.

PLN UID S2JB's response through clarification and apology on social media, especially Instagram, shows efforts to manage public perception. However, this strategy has not fully reached the public because not all people follow PLN UID S2JB's social media accounts, so it has the potential to cause information gaps and increase public dissatisfaction. This condition shows that the blackout is not only a technical disruption, but also a communication crisis that demands a more inclusive information delivery strategy to maintain public trust.

This brought the researcher's interest to find out the crisis communication strategy implemented by PT PLN UID S2JB in handling negative issues related to blackout incidents. By reviewing the various approaches carried out by PT PLN UID S2JB in dealing with crises, this study will provide insight into effective and relevant crisis communication strategies in crisis situations.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods are scientific ways to obtain data with specific purposes and uses(Muhammad Ramdhan, 2021). The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach or also referred to as a naturalistic method with natural conditions(Marliani, Siagian, 2017). This research uses a qualitative approach to understand the phenomena experienced by the research subjects, such as behavior, traits and perspectives. The research aims to explain the phenomenon as widely as possible through data collection.

The object to be studied in this study is the crisis communication strategy in responding to bad complaints at PT PLN (Persero) UID S2JB related to the Blackout incident.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PT PLN UID S2JB Crisis Communication Strategy in Handling Blackout Incident Complaints

Pre-Crisis Phase

Crisis communication carried out by PLN UID S2JB focuses on identifying the causes of the crisis, internal coordination, and delivering information to stakeholders quickly. In the early stages of the crisis, public relations first identifies the cause of the blackout before conveying information to the public. This action shows the existence of a process Information gathering and crisis recognition in crisis communication so that the information conveyed remains accurate even though it is still in the investigation stage (Coombs, 2023). This identification process is important because identifying problems as quickly as possible will have an impact on the accuracy, speed, and correct steps to make decisions (Qona'ah, 2020).

Critically, the role of public relations in the distribution regulatory unit is still limited to the collection of technical information, the use of WhatsApp which is focused on regional leaders shows communication that is limited and does not directly reach the community. Dependence on stakeholders as intermediaries has the potential to cause delays or distortion of information. Thus, the main weakness lies in the uneven distribution of information and has not yet touched the public directly.

Phases During Crisis

Critically, PLN UID S2JB emphasizes empathy in the form of real actions through information updates rather than just symbolic speeches. This approach is relevant because in the context of blackout, People tend to be more certain about when electricity will return to normal than formal apologies. However, too much focus on technical information can also give the impression that the emotional aspects of society receive less attention if it is not accompanied by more humane interpersonal communication. In addition, the delivery of empathy through

the percentage of recovery is not necessarily able to answer the anxiety of community groups that have suffered large losses, such as business actors or the important service sector.

Post-Crisis Phase

Critically, the statement that the crisis is being used as a business opportunity indicates a shift in orientation from recovery to commercialization of services. On the one hand, this step can be considered a rational preventive strategy, especially for business segments that need electricity reliability. However, this approach has the potential to pose an ethical dilemma if it is not balanced with trust restoration efforts that focus on the public interest at large. From a crisis communication perspective, communities affected by blackouts are fundamentally more in need of guaranteed stability of key services than paid alternative offerings (Coombs, 2023). Therefore, without a thorough evaluation of public perception, the strategy risks not being effective in restoring public trust. This condition can even give rise to a negative image that the organization is more oriented to the interests of the company than the responsibility of service to the community (A. N. A. Sari & Arifin, 2024).

Potential for Bad Complaints in Triggering a Crisis of Trust in PT PLN UID S2JB

Characteristics and Spread of Bad Public Complaints

The researcher's findings show that PLN UID S2JB public relations conducts Sweeping social media by monitoring comments, uploads and news related to PLN. However, based on the results of the researcher's observations, the monitoring is still more focused on the media used by the company, such as Instagram and media in collaboration with PLN UID S2JB. Meanwhile, the development of public opinion is more active in the Platform other public spaces to deliver responses directly.

This condition shows that the company's media monitoring pattern has not been fully able to keep up with the development of public conversations in various Platform Social Media. As a result, companies have the potential to be late in knowing the development of bad issues that are being talked about by the public.

The Escalation of Complaints Becomes a Crisis of Public Trust

If associated with SCCT, the use of this personal account still has risks because crisis communication should be carried out consistently through the official PLN UID S2JB channel, this is not in accordance with the SCCT concept, namely speaking with one voice (Coombs, 2023). The use of personal social media accounts can make it difficult for the public to distinguish official company information from the personal opinions of PLN public relations. However, this step can still be understood as an effort by PLN UID S2JB public relations to take advantage of golden time so that public complaints can be responded to immediately before the crisis develops (A. N. A. Sari & Arifin, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that PT PLN (Persero) UID S2JB's crisis communication strategy in handling complaints about blackout incidents is carried out through three phases, namely the pre-crisis phase, the crisis phase, and the post-crisis phase. In the pre-crisis phase, PLN UID S2JB public relations identified the cause of the disruption, internal coordination, and delivered initial information to stakeholders as a form of communication preparedness. In the crisis phase, the company conveys information about blackouts and the progress of electricity restoration through various communication channels, monitors public opinion, and conveys empathy to the public through regular information updates. Meanwhile, in the post-crisis phase, PLN UID S2JB conducted evaluation, network maintenance, and service improvement as a form of effort to restore public trust after the blackout. The communication strategy shows that PLN UID S2JB has applied several principles in SCCT theory, such as instructing information, adjusting information, corrective action, and bolstering strategy in the crisis communication process.

The results of the study also show that negative complaints from the public can potentially trigger a crisis of public trust in PT PLN (Persero) UID S2JB. The characteristics of public complaints dominated by demands for transparency and clarity of information show that the public not only problems the blackout, but also the lack of clarity of information received during the crisis. The spread of complaints on social media, communication response delays, and monitoring of public opinion that has not been maximized have caused the public's bad perception of the company to grow. This condition shows that crisis communication not only serves to convey information related to power outages, but also plays an important role in maintaining the reputation and public trust in PT PLN (Persero) UID S2JB.

SUGGESTIONS

PT PLN (Persero) UID S2JB to increase the speed and disclosure of information during blackouts so that the public does not experience information uncertainty that can trigger the development of bad perceptions of the company.

PLN UID S2JB is advised to expand the monitoring of public opinion on various social media platforms, not only focusing on Instagram and media that collaborate with the company, so that the development of complaints

and negative public opinions can be known faster.

This research is expected to be a reference for future research that discusses crisis communication strategies in public service companies, especially in dealing with the blackout crisis.

Further research is recommended to involve the public or customers as research informants so that the research results not only focus on the company's perspective, but also see the public's response directly.

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