

Crisis Communication Strategy PT. PLN (Persero) in Responding to Electric Blackout in Jakarta in 2019

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Abstract

Electricity is a primary need for people in the world, including Indonesia. PT. PLN (Persero) is the only electric company in Indonesia that provides electricity. The electricity blackout that occurred on August 4, 2019 in Jakarta as well as in several areas in West Java, Banten and Central Java paralyzed residents' activities, public services and industry. Using descriptive qualitative methods based on Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) with data collected through documents in the form of news related to the electricity blackout, this study tries to identify and describe how the Public Relations of PT. PLN (Persero) as a company that provides electricity uses a strategy to manage and deal with the crisis. The results of this study indicate that the Public Relations of PT. PLN (Persero) uses a combination of primary crisis response strategies between a reduction strategy (minimized) and a rebuild strategy (rebuild). In addition, they also use a secondary crisis response strategy in the form of a boosting strategy and a victim strategy.

Keywords: *Crisis Communication, Electric Blackout, Public Relations, Crisis Response, SCCT.*



A. INTRODUCTION

Electricity is a resource that humans need to live their lives. Currently, electricity has become a primary need for humans throughout the world, including in Indonesia. The current demand for electricity continues to increase along with the development of technology and human civilization. Currently, almost all human activities currently require electricity. Starting from office activities, shops, factories, industry, malls, households, transportation, health, internet, and others.

To meet the daily needs of modern humans already depend on electricity, it is inconceivable that if there is a disturbance in the flow of electricity, it will disrupt the communication system, business and the fulfillment of community needs. This can happen because almost all have been connected to the internet using electricity.

Electricity service providers for people throughout Indonesia are provided by PT. PLN (Persero). Based on the mandate of the 1945 Constitution, Article 33 paragraph 2 clearly stipulates that the production branches which are important to the State and which affect the livelihood of the people are controlled by the State. (UUD 1945, 1945). With this mandate, PT. PLN (Persero) under the auspices of a State-Owned Enterprise or BUMN is given the power to provide electricity services for the people of Indonesia. This is then confirmed by the function of PT. PLN (Persero) in Law Number 30 of 2009 concerning Electricity. (Law Number 30, 2009) Being the only

company that provides electricity services, PT. PLN (Persero), should provide maximum service because all people depend on PT. PLN (Persero).

In carrying out its duties as a provider of electricity services, an obstacle or problem arises which is faced by PT. PLN (Persero). Constraints or problems experienced by PT. PLN (Persero) is called a crisis. This incident occurred on Sunday, August 4, 2019 at 11.45 WIB. There were electricity blackouts in Jakarta, West Java, Banten and parts of Central Java. (Ramadan, 2019). The incident caused a power outage for 8 to 18 hours. The blackout incident caused a lot of losses, resulting in various negative impacts in many ways, including the communication network being cut off, cellular operator customers being disturbed because they couldn't communicate due to lost cellular network signals, such as Telkomsel, XL Axiata, 3, and Indosat Ooredoo. The Minister of Communications and Information Technology or Menkominfo (2019) revealed that the losses suffered by cellular network provider operators due to this electricity blackout reached 100 billion.

Not only cellular networks, transportation facilities also suffered losses. The train, namely the Jakarta Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) was stopped because it used electric power to propel it. Finally the passengers were evacuated from the underground tunnel. Kamaludin (2019) revealed that 100 percent of passengers were successfully evacuated. The commuter line or KRL was also paralyzed and resulted in many passengers being stranded at a number of stations. Wiwik (2019) as the President Director of PT Kereta Commuter Indonesia explained that based on PT KAI's statistical data, on weekends PT Kereta Commuter Indonesia, usually can carry up to 808,336 passengers.

The occurrence of this electric blackout has attracted a lot of public attention from various circles. One of them is the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Mr. Joko Widodo or commonly called Jokowi. President Jokowi expressed his disappointment with this huge electricity blackout incident. In this case, President Jokowi questioned PLN's ability to respond to emergency situations such as a system failure in the event of a significant, long-lasting power outage. This seems to indicate that the PLN Risk Mitigation Plan seems inadequate (Azanella, 2019).

Media coverage is one indication that a company, institution or organization is experiencing a crisis. Coombs and Holladay (2010) state that the stages of a crisis experienced by an organization can be seen from the coverage in the media, the more widespread reporting that raises the crisis of an organization, it is said that the crisis in the organization has entered a chronic phase (Coombs, W. T. & Holladay, 2010) . Media plays a very important role in crisis management.

A crisis situation in a company or organization will result in increasing problems, becoming a public spotlight (either through mass media coverage or information spread by word of mouth), disrupting the smooth operation of operations, damaging the work system and work ethic, and causing chaos. to the joints of the company as a whole (Ruslan, 2014). As a result, all activities stopped. So that people panic and invite government intervention, like it or not, they have to help overcome the problems that arise.

A crisis in a company, institution or organization can endanger the reputation of the company itself, especially if the company, institution or organization has worked hard to build it. The impact or consequences of the crisis are not only detrimental to the company concerned, but also certain communities or other people who suffer. Furthermore, if the crisis is related to a product or service, it will have an impact on the company's customer satisfaction. This is a challenge for the company's public relations department to implement a good crisis communication strategy so that the crisis does not last long and does not harm the company's reputation.

Based on the description above, the problems that arise in this study are how the crisis communication strategy of PT. PLN (Persero) in managing and responding to the crisis due to the electricity blackout that occurred in Jakarta. While the purpose of this study is to describe crisis communication strategies.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Crisis Communication

When a crisis occurs, communication is very important so that the public receives accurate information. Communication is very important to do to maintain good relations between public relations and the public. Crisis as a process was conveyed by G. Harrison (2005:11) in Kriyantono (2015) when researching communication strategies as the basis for implementing crisis management, that a crisis is a critical period associated with an event that can have a negative impact on the organization. As a result, prompt and appropriate decisions must be made to avoid disrupting the operations of the organization as a whole. To avoid unforeseen impacts, decision-making inevitably requires bold steps of information processing. A crisis is a situation that has a negative impact on the organization and its stakeholders, as well as its products and reputation. Therefore, quick and appropriate decisions need to be made so as not to affect the overall operations of the organization. (Kriyantono, 2015)

2. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is a theory that was discovered by W.T. Coombs and Holladay S. J. This theory is used to refer to how crises affect an organization's reputation. This theory is also useful for finding out how to maintain one's reputation as much as possible in the midst of a communication crisis (Coombs, 2007).

SCCT discusses how an organization behaves in dealing with a crisis. The basis of SCCT itself can be found through Attribution Theory. Attribution theory which asserts that the public always looks for causes, or makes attributions, for events, especially if the events are very unfavorable or unexpected (Coombs, 2018).

SCCT is also used to understand how stakeholders respond to crisis response strategies designed by public relations practitioners. In a crisis management team, public relations usually plays a critical role in the critical management team. Stakeholder response, ultimately affects the reputation of the organization, and allows

stakeholders to decide whether they will deal with the organization in the future or not. (Kriyantono, 2014b).

C. METHODS

The research approach used in this research is a qualitative approach with a descriptive type of research. Qualitative research with results in the form of data expressed in the form of sentences through in-depth data mining (Kriyantono, 2014a).

The research method used in this study is a case study, according to Yin (2003) a case study is a method that refers to research that has elements of how and why in the main research questions and examines contemporary (present) problems and the lack of opportunities for researchers to control the events (cases) under study.

In this study, data was collected from news documents related to the case of electricity blackouts obtained from various media. Existing documents will be analyzed and categorized into crisis response strategies in SCCT.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The role of public relations of PT. PLN (Persero) in Crisis Communication

The electricity blackout in Jakarta, Banten, West Java, and parts of Central Java on August 4, 2019 was a crisis for PT. PLN (Persero). The occurrence of electrical blackouts was caused by a technical error, namely the impact of the disruption of the network system on the Ungaran-Pemalang 500 KV Extra High Voltage Line. As a result, the electricity system of DKI Jakarta, Banten, and parts of West Java and Central Java have been paralyzed. This blackout phenomenon occurs in the range of 8-18 hours.

According to Coombs in his book *Ongoing Crisis Communication* (1999), a crisis due to electric blackouts like this is classified as a type of crisis, technical breakdowns, namely Crisis occurs when the technology used or provided by the organization fails or is damaged.

Public Relations PT. PLN (Persero) responded to the technical breakdown by distributing press releases and providing information to the media through press conferences. The purpose of the press conference is to explain information about the occurrence of electricity blackouts and management steps in responding to the crisis. Acting President Director, Sri Peni Inten Cahyani was appointed as the spokesperson at the press conference held at the PT. PLN (Persero). In addition to public relations, the CEO is a communicator who is considered to have high credibility and news value related to the existing crisis (Kriyantono, 2015)

In the conference it was seen that PT. PLN is very careful in providing information to the public. As stated by Kriyantono (2015, p 251) the crisis situation of media scrutiny (media scrutiny) is very large, but companies do not need to rush to convey information that is still unclear or does not have valid facts.

2. Primary Crisis Response Strategy Reduction: Excuse

The first prime crisis response strategy was carried out by PT. PLN Persero is an excuse, namely the crisis response reduction strategy is shown as the news delivered by *kompas.com*, I Made Suprateka who is the Executive Vice President of Corporate Communications & CSR of PLN revealed that, there was a disturbance in the 500 kV Ungaran and Pemalang transition, making energy transfer from east to west failed. The statement PT.PLN (Persero) stated that the blackout incident was beyond the control of PT. PLN (Persero). This strategy minimizes responsibility, because it shows the intention to deny.

In addition, Acting President Director Sri Peni Inten Cahyani, who was the spokesperson at the press conference, told the cause of the blackout incident in West Java, DKI Jakarta, and Banten. The blackout began at 11.45.09 am due to a disturbance in the 500 KV Ungaran-Pemalang Extra High Voltage Air Line (SUTET). Sri Peni said that the electric blackout was a technical problem. Referring to the SCCT what Sri Peni Inten said are the reasons that show the denial that the organization intentionally caused a crisis or in other words the electricity blackout was beyond the control of the company.

3. Rebuilding Primary Crisis Response Strategy: Compensation, Apology and Framing

Framing Strategy as a crisis management strategy, organizations provide information to the public openly as a two-way communication so as to frame news and shape public opinion. The framing strategy seen in several reports submitted by the mass media, namely the news dated August 4, 2019, *Kompas.com*, totaling 3 news items. The three news stories provide news framing from stakeholders PT. PLN (Persero).

At *kompas.com*, framing through monitoring on Twitter, that blackouts occurred in several areas. This can be seen from the following news excerpt: "Based on observations on Twitter, it was reported to have occurred in Jakarta, Bandung, Bogor, Depok, Bekasi, Cilegon". *Kompas.com* August 4, 2019. In addition to the framing above, there are a number of framings that occurred due to the electricity blackout that occurred in the transportation sector. The trip was disrupted and passengers using the KRL or MRT trains had to be evacuated from the carriages as stated in the following statement.

The framing took place on August 5, 2019. There are several interesting things related to this framing. First, PT. PLN (Persero) cannot confirm when electricity will return to normal. As stated by the Executive Vice President of Corporate Communications and CSR of PT PLN, Dwi Suryo Abdullah, who said that the electricity supply had not yet recovered due to hot spots during the distribution of electricity to Jakarta and its surroundings.

Second, framing when President Joko Widodo visited the PT PLN (Persero) office. President Joko Widodo wants to hear directly from related parties, namely the Acting Director Utama PT. PLN (Persero) regarding this Electricity Blackout

incident. Then President Joko Widodo expressed his disappointment with this incident.

Third, Framing about losses in shops. This electricity blackout has caused a significant impact on a number of businesses such as Alfamart and Indomart. Both companies must use generators to meet the needs of electricity at their outlets. This obviously makes operational costs increase.

Apology Strategy is a strategy carried out by apologizing to the victim. At the time the electricity blackout occurred, the first apology strategy used by the Executive Vice President of Corporate Communication & CSR of PLN, I Made Suprateka, can be seen in the following statement: "We apologize profusely for the blackout that occurred, currently we are continuing our normalization efforts, even some substations have started successfully igniting," said I Made Suprateka in an official release received by Kompas.com, Sunday (4/8/). 2019).

The second, apologies were also conveyed by the Acting President Director as the responsibility for the crisis. The following is a statement of apology from the Acting President Director: "Insha Allah, hopefully the recovery process will run smoothly through these networks. Once again, allow us as PLN management to apologize as widely as possible to PLN customers," said Sripeni Inten (PLT Managing Director of PT PLN (Persero))"

In addition to the framing and apology strategy, the compensation strategy was also used by PT PLN (Persero) as a response to the electricity blackout crisis in Jakarta. PT. PLN (Persero) promised to improve the related system. This can be seen in I Made Suprateka's statement below: "We promise to make and exert our maximum efforts to repair the system so that electricity returns to normal," said I Made suprateka.

4. Reinforcement Secondary Crisis Response Strategy: Bolstering and Victimage

In addition to the primary crisis response strategy, PT. PLN (Persero) also carries out a secondary crisis response strategy in the form of bolstering and victimage. Bolstering strategy is a strategy to strengthen reputation. For the first time, PT PLN (Persero) has done a Reminder. This is a strategy by reminding the organization's reputation services in the pre-crisis period. This is very important to do, reminding that company services can restore public trust.

In this Blackout incident, PT. PLN (Persero) is really trying to make improvements. PT. PLN (Persero) promised to exert maximum efforts to improve so that electricity returns to normal. As well as giving hope that the electricity will turn on soon, it doesn't have to be until midnight.

For the secondary crisis response strategy, Victimage strengthening as a crisis management strategy is carried out by reminding the public that the company is also a victim in the current situation. PT.PLN (Persero) uses Victimage with the aim of stating that this electricity blackout is not entirely the fault of PT. PLN (Persero).

At the beginning of the electricity blackout incident, PT PLN (Persero) did not immediately provide information to the media. Public Relations PT. PLN (Persero)

waited for several hours, after which it gave information to the media regarding what had happened. For certainty when the electricity will turn on Public Relations of PT PLN (Persero) cannot provide certainty. seen in the statement of the Acting President Director of PT PLN (Persero) which said, "Hopefully it can be less than 00.00 WIB, yes, it can be normal again," said Sripeni Inten Cahyani at a press conference in Gandul, Cinere, Sunday (4/8/2019) (kompas.com)". through the press conference, it was known that there was an electric blackout, there was a disturbance in the flow of electric current in Pematang Ugaran, and currently.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that the strategy undertaken by PT. PLN (Persero) in managing the crisis due to electricity blackouts in Jakarta and its surroundings is a combination of primary crisis response strategies. Reduction (minimized): Excuse and Rebuild. The reduction strategy is carried out by presenting the reasons at the press conference. Meanwhile, the reduction strategy was carried out through an apology to the public. In addition to carrying out the primary strategy of PT. PLN (Persero) also implements a secondary crisis response strategy in the form of bolstering and victimization strategies. The affirmative strategy is carried out through that in this Blackout incident, PT. PLN (Persero) is really trying to make improvements. PT. PLN (Persero) promised to exert maximum efforts to improve so that electricity returns to normal. As well as giving hope that the electricity will turn on soon, it doesn't have to be until midnight.

Based on the findings and discussions in this study, the suggestion that can be given by researchers for further research is a more in-depth analysis of the use of corporate social media as a crisis communication medium. in crisis communication demands clarity and speed of information needed, social media is a media that is more effective and efficient and able to accommodate the public's response to crisis communication.

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