

Crisis communication strategies of Pertamina during the fuel controversy: A Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) Perspective



^{1*}Jerry Rolando, ²Easter Tobing

^{1,2} Program Magister Manajemen, Perbanas Institute, Jakarta - Indonesia

^{1*}jerry.sirait@gmail.com (corresponding author)

²eastertobing@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Organizational crises can significantly threaten corporate reputation, particularly for companies operating in strategic sectors with high public visibility. Effective crisis communication is essential to manage stakeholder perceptions, reduce uncertainty, and restore organizational credibility. This study examines Pertamina's crisis communication strategies during the fuel controversy in February 2025 through the lens of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). This research employs a qualitative case study approach using directed qualitative content analysis. Data were collected from eight key communication events (CE01–CE08) involving Pertamina, government institutions, technical authorities, and stakeholder representatives during the crisis period. The collected data were analyzed based on SCCT response strategies, including deny, diminish, rebuild, and bolstering strategies, as well as the role of external stakeholder validation in strengthening crisis communication credibility. The findings reveal that Pertamina adopted a multi-strategy crisis communication approach by combining diminish, rebuild, and bolstering strategies throughout different stages of the crisis. During the initial response phase, Pertamina primarily used clarification and technical explanation to reduce stakeholder uncertainty. As reputational risks increased, the organization incorporated accountability and corrective communication through rebuilding strategies. External validation further from independent institutions and government stakeholders contributed to strengthening communication credibility and supporting stakeholder confidence. Theoretically the research extends the application of SCCT beyond organizational response strategies by incorporating the role of external institutional credibility in reputation recovery. Practically, the findings provide guidance for organizations operating in high-risk and public-oriented industries by emphasizing the importance of transparent communication, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive crisis response strategies.

Keywords: Crisis Communication; Situational Crisis Communication Theory; SCCT; Reputation Management; Stakeholder Trust; Qualitative Content Analysis; Pertamina



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INTRODUCTION

Corporate crises can significantly damage organizational reputation and erode stakeholder trust, particularly when they involve products or services that directly affect public safety and everyday life (Coombs, 2007; Coombs, 2013). In the energy sector, fuel quality is closely associated with consumer confidence, economic welfare, and national energy security. PT Pertamina (Persero), Indonesia's state-owned energy company, became the focus of national attention following allegations of fuel adulteration involving Peralite and Pertamax in early 2025. The controversy generated extensive media coverage and widespread public discussion, raising concerns about fuel quality, distribution control, and corporate accountability (Kompas.com, 2025). Besides potential financial losses and mechanical damage experienced by consumers, the incident posed a substantial reputational challenge by reducing public confidence in Pertamina as the country's primary energy provider.

Effective crisis communication plays a critical role in reducing uncertainty, demonstrating organizational accountability, and restoring stakeholder trust (Coombs, 2013). Delayed or inconsistent communication may intensify reputational damage and increase stakeholder attribution of responsibility (Coombs, 2013). Today news media strongly influence public interpretation of organizational crises, understanding how crisis responses are communicated and portrayed becomes an important aspect of crisis management (Entman, 1993; Coombs, 2007; An & Gower, 2009).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by Coombs (2007), provides a widely accepted framework for selecting crisis response strategies based on stakeholder perceptions of organizational responsibility. SCCT classifies crises into victim, accidental, and preventable clusters, each requiring different communication approaches. For preventable crises, where organizations are perceived to bear high responsibility, the theory recommends accommodative responses particularly rebuilding strategies such as apology and corrective action to facilitate reputation recovery.

Previous studies have widely applied SCCT across different organizational contexts. Research consistently shows that accommodative strategies are generally more effective than denial strategies when stakeholders attribute high crisis responsibility to an organization (Hirschfeld & Thielsch, 2022; Yu & Ye, 2025). SCCT has been used in Indonesia to examine crisis communication involving government institutions, banking, aviation, and selected energy-related cases (Prasetyo & Chasana, 2023; Hutasoit et al., 2023; Hidayati & Purworini, 2025; Maulana, 2024). Empirical research remains limited regarding how crisis communication strategies adopted by Indonesia's state-owned energy enterprises are portrayed by different online news media, particularly during the 2025 Pertamina fuel controversy. Evidence is still lacking on whether Pertamina's crisis responses were consistent with SCCT recommendations for crises characterized by high stakeholder attribution of responsibility.

Addressing this gap, the present study applies SCCT to examine Pertamina's crisis communication strategies during the alleged fuel adulteration controversy. Using qualitative content analysis, the study analyzes news coverage published by CNN Indonesia, Kompas.com, Tempo and CNBC Indonesia with particular attention to the crisis response strategies reflected in Pertamina's official communications and the role of external stakeholder validation.

This study contributes to the crisis communication literature in two ways. First, it extends the application of SCCT to Indonesia's state-owned energy sector by examining a contemporary organizational crisis with significant public impact. Second it provides practical insights into how crisis response strategies and external stakeholder

involvement can strengthen communication credibility and support reputation recovery during high-profile organizational crises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crisis Communication

Crisis communication refers to the strategic process through which organizations collect, manage, and disseminate information before, during, and after a crisis to minimize reputational damage and maintain stakeholder trust (Coombs, 2007; Coombs, 2010; Fearn-Banks, 2017). Effective crisis communication is essential because organizational crises create uncertainty, attract intense media attention, and influence public perceptions of organizational responsibility (Coombs, 2007).

Digital Communication

Digital environment today made information spreads rapidly through online news platforms and social media, making organizational responses more visible and subject to immediate public evaluation. Stakeholders increasingly expect organizations to provide accurate, transparent, and timely information during crises (Coombs, 2007; Coombs, 2010; Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Failure to communicate effectively may intensify negative public sentiment, increase reputational damage, and reduce consumer confidence (Wang et al., 2021).

Previous studies have consistently shown that crisis communication significantly affects organizational reputation and stakeholder behavior. Organizations that provide transparent information, acknowledge stakeholder concerns, and demonstrate corrective actions generally experience faster reputation recovery than those relying primarily on defensive communication strategies (Park, 2016; Badu et al., 2023). Consequently, selecting an appropriate communication strategy has become one of the most critical managerial decisions during organizational crises.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by Coombs (2007) is one of the most widely adopted theoretical frameworks in crisis communication research. The theory argues that crisis response strategies should be selected based on stakeholder's attribution of responsibility for the crisis. The greater the perceived organizational responsibility, the stronger the accommodative response required to protect organizational reputation.

SCCT categorizes crises into three primary clusters according to the level of attributed responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2012):

- Victim Cluster, in which the organization is also perceived as a victim and therefore bears minimal responsibility.
- Accidental Cluster, where the crisis results from unintentional events and the organization receives moderate responsibility.
- Preventable Cluster, where the crisis is considered avoidable because it results from organizational negligence, unethical behavior, or management failure. This cluster generates the highest level of reputational threat because stakeholders attribute substantial responsibility to the organization.

Based on these crisis clusters, SCCT proposes four categories of crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007; Coombs, 2013):

- Denial Strategy, which attempts to eliminate any connection between the organization and the crisis through denial, attacking the accuser, or scapegoating.
- Diminish Strategy, which seeks to reduce organizational responsibility by providing excuses or justifications for the crisis.
- Rebuild Strategy, which focuses on restoring stakeholder trust through apology, compensation, and corrective actions. This strategy is recommended for preventable crises because organizations are perceived to bear significant responsibility.
- Bolstering Strategy, which complements the primary response by reminding stakeholders of the organization's positive reputation, expressing appreciation, or portraying the organization as a victim of the situation.

Among these strategies SCCT recommends the rebuild strategy as the most appropriate response for preventable crises because it demonstrates accountability, empathy, and organizational commitment to resolving stakeholder concerns (Coombs, 2007).

METHOD

Directed qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was adopted within a qualitative research approach to examine Pertamina's crisis communication strategies during the fuel controversy in February 2025. A qualitative approach was selected because this research aims to explore how an organization constructs crisis messages, responds to stakeholder concerns, and manages reputational risks during a public controversy (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provides the primary analytical framework for this research. Developed by Coombs (2007), the theory explains that effective crisis communication depends on the relationship between crisis responsibility attribution, selected response strategies, and stakeholder expectations. Through this framework, the study analyzes how Pertamina responded to the crisis, which SCCT strategies were applied, how external stakeholders contributed to communication credibility, and whether the response was aligned with reputation restoration principles. The research methodology is designed to address the following research questions:

- RQ1: How did Pertamina communicate with stakeholders during the fuel controversy crisis in February 2025?
- RQ2: What crisis response strategies based on SCCT were applied by Pertamina in managing the controversy?
- RQ3: How did external stakeholders, including government institutions and technical authorities, influence the credibility of Pertamina's crisis communication?
- RQ4: What is Pertamina's crisis communication strategies aligned with SCCT principles in restoring organizational reputation and stakeholder trust?

Employing a single case study approach (Yin, 2018), the research examines PT Pertamina during the fuel controversy in February 2025. Case selection was guided by the controversy's significance as an organizational crisis involving public concerns, government attention, technical verification, and reputational risks.

Operating in a strategic public sector, PT Pertamina depends heavily on stakeholder trust and public confidence. Consequently, the controversy offers an appropriate setting for examining organizational crisis communication and reputation

recovery. Spanning 25–28 February 2025, the period of analysis encompasses public statements and official responses issued by Pertamina and related institutions as the crisis unfolded.

Primary data were collected through document analysis of official crisis communication materials. Document analysis is considered appropriate for crisis communication research because organizational responses are commonly delivered through formal statements, press releases, and public announcements.

The dataset consists of eight key communication events (CE01–CE08) identified during the crisis period. Each communication event represents an important stage of crisis development and stakeholder communication. Following the directed qualitative content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), the communication events were analyzed using coding categories derived from the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007). The coding framework included:

- Date of Communication
- Crisis Phase
- Institution and Spokeperson
- Communication Strategy
- SCCT Response Strategy for Pertamina
- Supporting Communication Strategy
- Evidence Type

The coding framework is summarized in Table 1 includes the following analytical categories.

Table 1
Crisis Communication Events and SCCT Coding Framework

ID	Date	Crisis Phase	Institution	Spokesperson	Communication Strategy	Primary SCCT Strategy	Supporting Strategy	Evidence Type
CE01	26-Feb-25	Initial Crisis	Attorney General	Head of Legal Information Center – Agung Harli Siregar	Investigation Statement	N/A	N/A	Government Statement
CE02	25-Feb-25	Initial Response	Pertamina	VP Corporate Communication - Fadjar Djoko Santoso	Clarification	Diminish	Deny	Corporate Response
CE03	25-Feb-25	Initial Response	Pertamina Patra Niaga	Act President Director - Mars Ega Legowo	Technical Explanation	Diminish	Bolstering (Reminder)	Corporate Response
CE04	26-Feb-25	Reputation Recovery	Pertamina	President Director - Simon Aloysius Mantiri	Public Apology	Rebuild	Bolstering (Reminder)	Corporate Response
CE05	26-Feb-25	Reputation Recovery	Pertamina Patra Niaga	Corporate Secretary - Heppy Wulansari	Technical Assurance	Diminish	Bolstering (Reminder)	Corporate Response

CE06	28-Feb-25	External Reinforcement	Lemigas	Head of Lemigas - Mustafid Gunawan	Technical Validation	N/A	External Validation	Independent Statement
CE07	26-Feb-25	External Reinforcement	Ministry Energy and Mineral Resources	Minister - Bahlil Lahadalia	Government Validation	N/A	External Validation	Government Statement
CE08	26-Feb-25	Stakeholder Reinforcement	DPR RI	Deputy Chairman of Commission XII DPR - Bambang Haryadi	Stakeholder Statement	N/A	External Validation	Stakeholder Statement

Based on the communication events indicate that Pertamina's crisis response developed through several phases, beginning with clarification and technical explanation, followed by reputation recovery efforts and supported by external stakeholder validation.

Collected data were analyzed using directed qualitative content analysis, where SCCT concepts served as the initial coding framework. The analysis process consisted of three stages (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005):

1. Identification of Crisis Communication Messages: The first stage involved identifying key messages delivered by Pertamina and other stakeholders. The analysis examined how the crisis was framed, how responsibility was addressed, and how the organization responded to stakeholder concerns.
2. Classification of SCCT Response Strategies: Pertamina's communication events were categorized according to four SCCT response strategies. The analytical focus of each SCCT response strategy is summarized in Tabel 2.

Table 2
Pertamina SCCT Response Strategies

SCCT Strategy	Analytical Focus
Deny Strategy	Communication efforts that reject crisis responsibility, challenge allegations, or reduce organizational attribution.
Diminish Strategy	Communication efforts that reduce perceived severity of the crisis or explain contextual circumstances.
Rebuild Strategy	Communication involving corrective actions, accountability, apology, and reputation restoration efforts.
Bolstering Strategy	Communication emphasizing organizational strengths, achievements, and positive reputation.

Source: Adapted from Coombs (2007) and developed by the authors.

Based on the coding process, Pertamina's communication was primarily analyzed through diminish, rebuild, and bolstering strategies, while external institutions were analyzed based on their role in strengthening information credibility.

3. Evaluation of Research Propositions

Here are the findings were subsequently evaluated against the four research propositions:

- P1: Crisis situations involving higher perceived organizational responsibility require rebuilding and corrective strategies to reduce reputational damage.
- P2: External validation from independent institutions strengthens crisis communication credibility and reduces stakeholder uncertainty.
- P3: Transparent, consistent, and evidence-based communication contributes to maintaining stakeholder trust during a crisis.
- P4: Crisis communication effectiveness depends on the alignment between crisis attribution, response strategy selection, and stakeholder expectations

Data Validity and Reliability

Research credibility was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing communication materials from multiple institutional sources (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). The analysis does not rely solely on Pertamina's perspective but also incorporates statements from government institutions, technical authorities, and stakeholder representatives. The use of multiple sources enables the identification of consistency, differences, and interactions between corporate communication and external stakeholder perspectives (Patton, 1999; Carter et al., 2014).

Application of SCCT provides a systematic analytical framework through predefined coding categories. This approach helps reduce researcher subjectivity and improves the reliability of qualitative interpretation (Coombs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data findings from the qualitative content analysis of Pertamina's crisis communication during the 2025 fuel controversy. Eight communication events (CE01–CE08) were identified and analyzed using the coding framework developed from Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The findings are organized into five themes, namely crisis trigger, corporate responses, external validation, stakeholder responses, and the overall mapping of SCCT response strategies.

Overview of Pertamina's Crisis Communication Response

Pertamina's communication pattern demonstrates that did not rely on a single response strategy. The organization applied a combination of diminish, rebuild, and bolstering strategies to address stakeholder concerns and maintain organizational credibility. The crisis communication process can be categorized into three main phases:

1. Initial Response Phase, during the early stage of the crisis, Pertamina focused on providing clarification and technical explanations regarding public concerns. Communication during this phase aimed to reduce uncertainty and provide contextual information regarding the issue.
2. Reputation Recovery Phase, as public attention increased, Pertamina shifted its communication toward accountability and corrective actions. Public statements emphasized commitment to improvement and maintaining stakeholder confidence.
3. External Reinforcement Phase, government institutions and technical authorities contributed independent validation to strengthen information credibility and support stakeholder understanding of the situation.

Table 3 presents the coding results, illustrating how Pertamina's crisis communication strategies evolved throughout the different phases of the crisis.

Table 3
Pertamina Crisis Communication Strategies Based on SCCT (RQ1 and RQ2)

Communication Strategy	Communication Events	Main Purpose
Clarification and Technical Explanation	CE02, CE03	Addressing uncertainty and explaining organizational position
Public Accountability and Corrective Response	CE04	Demonstrating responsibility and commitment to improvement
Technical Assurance	CE05	Providing additional explanation regarding operational aspects
External Validation	CE06, CE07, CE08	Strengthening credibility through independent stakeholder involvement

Source: Adapted from Coombs (2007) and developed by the authors.

Pertamina's crisis communication strategy evolved throughout the crisis period, primarily employing diminish, rebuild, and bolstering strategies. The sequential application of these strategies reflected the changing nature of stakeholder concerns.

Diminish Strategy: Clarification and Reduction of Crisis Uncertainty

The diminish strategy was identified in CE02, CE03, and CE05. Pertamina used clarification, technical explanation, and assurance messages to reduce uncertainty surrounding the controversy. Through these communication events, Pertamina emphasized operational explanations and provided information regarding quality control processes. The objective was to influence stakeholder interpretation by reducing perceptions that the organization had failed to manage the situation.

Diminish strategy was particularly visible during the initial response phase, where Pertamina attempted to provide factual clarification before moving toward broader reputation recovery communication.

Rebuild Strategy: Accountability and Reputation Recovery

Rebuild strategy was identified in CE04 through Pertamina's public apology and commitment to corrective actions. The communication represented actual explanation toward accountability. Pertamina acknowledged stakeholder concerns and emphasized efforts to improve processes and maintain public trust.

The analysis indicates that Pertamina incorporated a more accommodative response when the crisis required stronger stakeholder reassurance.

Bolstering Strategy: Reinforcement of Organizational Credibility

Bolstering elements were identified as supporting strategies in CE03, CE04, and CE05. Pertamina reinforced its communication by highlighting organizational commitment, operational capability, and responsibility in maintaining energy availability for the public.

Rather than functioning as a standalone strategy, bolstering accompanied clarification and corrective communication to support the overall reputation management process.

Role of External Stakeholders in Strengthening Crisis Communication Credibility

Data findings demonstrate that external stakeholders played an important role in strengthening the credibility of crisis communication. Three categories of external communication were identified:

1. Government Investigation and Oversight: CE01 from the Attorney General Office provided information regarding the investigation process. This communication contributed to transparency by acknowledging institutional involvement in reviewing the situation.
2. Technical Validation: CE06 from Lemigas provided independent technical validation related to the controversy. The involvement of a technical authority contributed additional credibility because stakeholders received information from an institution outside the company.
3. Government and Stakeholder Reassurance: CE07 from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and CE08 from DPR RI represented broader stakeholder responses. These communications reflected government monitoring and public representation in addressing stakeholder concerns.

Analysis of the communication events indicates that crisis communication credibility was not generated solely through corporate statements but was strengthened through interaction with independent and institutional stakeholders.

Alignment of Pertamina's Crisis Communication with SCCT Principles

Pertamina's crisis communication approach demonstrated alignment with SCCT principles through the combination of clarification, corrective action, and reputation reinforcement. The analysis identified that Pertamina adjusted its communication strategy according to crisis development.

Table 4
Pertamina Adjust Crisis Communication Strategies Based on SCCT Principles (RQ4)

Crisis Stage	Communication Focus	SCCT Strategy Identified
Initial Response	Clarification and explanation	Diminish
Escalation and Reputation Risk	Accountability and corrective action	Rebuild
Reputation Reinforcement	Organizational credibility and stakeholder confidence	Bolstering

The corporate response moved beyond defensive communication and incorporated strategies aimed at maintaining stakeholder trust.

Evaluation of Research Propositions

The findings provide support for the four research propositions developed in this study.

Table 5
Evaluation Research Proportion

Proposition	Findings	Status
P1: Crisis situations involving higher perceived responsibility require rebuilding and corrective strategies to reduce reputational damage.	Pertamina introduced accountability and corrective communication through public apology and improvement commitments.	Supported

P2: External validation from independent institutions strengthens crisis communication credibility.	Statements from Lemigas and government institutions provided additional credibility and reduced uncertainty.	Supported
P3: Transparent, consistent, and evidence-based communication contributes to maintaining stakeholder trust.	Pertamina used clarification, technical explanation, and verification-based communication throughout the crisis period.	Supported
P4: Crisis communication effectiveness depends on alignment between crisis attribution, response strategy selection, and stakeholder expectations.	Pertamina combined diminish, rebuild, and bolstering strategies according to crisis development and stakeholder needs.	Supported

Source: Authors' analysis based on Coombs (2007)

Pertamina adopted a multi-strategy crisis communication approach to manage the fuel controversy. The organization initially focused on reducing uncertainty through clarification and technical explanations, followed by reputation recovery through accountability and corrective communication. The involvement of external stakeholders, particularly technical and government institutions, strengthened the credibility of crisis communication and supported stakeholder understanding.

Crisis Response Strategy and SCCT Alignment

The analysis result indicate that Pertamina's crisis communication response during the fuel controversy was characterized by a combination of diminish, rebuild, and bolstering strategies. The findings indicate that Pertamina did not rely solely on defensive communication but adopted a gradual response approach that evolved according to crisis development. The initial use of diminish strategies through clarification and technical explanations reflects an organizational effort to reduce uncertainty and manage stakeholder interpretation of the crisis. According to Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), organizations may apply diminish strategies when they attempt to reduce perceived crisis severity or responsibility attribution. In Pertamina's case, clarification was used to provide contextual information while maintaining organizational credibility.

However the data also indicate that clarification alone was insufficient to address reputational risks. As stakeholder concerns increased, Pertamina incorporated rebuilding strategies through public acknowledgment, corrective commitments, and accountability messages. This approach is consistent with SCCT principles, which emphasize that organizations facing greater perceived responsibility should demonstrate corrective actions to restore stakeholder confidence. The combination of diminish and rebuild strategies suggests that Pertamina attempted to balance two communication objectives: reducing unnecessary reputational damage while demonstrating responsibility toward stakeholder concerns.

The Role of External Validation in Crisis Communication Credibility

One of the important findings of this study is the significant role of external stakeholders in strengthening crisis communication credibility. The involvement of Lemigas, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, the Attorney General Office, and DPR RI demonstrates that crisis communication effectiveness is not determined solely by organizational statements. Instead, credibility is also influenced by how external institutions validate, interpret, and communicate information regarding the crisis.

Supports from the proposition that independent validation can reduce stakeholder uncertainty during a crisis. In situations involving technical issues, stakeholders may perceive information from independent authorities as more credible than information delivered only by the organization experiencing the crisis. From a crisis communication perspective, external validation functions as a credibility mechanism that supports transparency and reduces information asymmetry between organizations and stakeholders.

Transparency, Accountability, and Stakeholder Trust

The major highlight from transparency and accountability were central elements in Pertamina's crisis communication approach is the transition from technical clarification toward public apology and corrective communication indicates an adjustment in response strategy as stakeholder expectations developed. Rather than maintaining a purely defensive position, Pertamina communicated willingness to address concerns and improve processes.

Transparency and accountability maintained properly to supports the argument that effective crisis communication requires organizations to demonstrate not only competence but also responsibility. Stakeholders evaluate crisis responses not only based on whether organizations provide explanations but also on whether they demonstrate commitment to resolving the underlying issue. Therefore, transparency and accountability become important mechanisms for maintaining stakeholder trust, particularly for organizations with high public visibility and strategic importance.

Strategic Adaptation and Reputation Recovery

Strategic movement contribute to understanding how organizations adapt crisis communication strategies throughout different crisis stages. Pertamina's communication pattern shows a sequential adaptation:

1. Information management stage - providing clarification and technical explanations to address uncertainty.
2. Responsibility management stage - communicating accountability and corrective actions.
3. Reputation recovery stage - reinforcing credibility through organizational commitment and external validation.

The observed progression indicates that crisis communication is not a static process but requires continuous adjustment based on stakeholder reactions and crisis development. It's support SCCT's central argument that response strategies should be matched with crisis conditions and stakeholder perceptions. An inappropriate strategy may increase reputational damage, while an adaptive strategy can support recovery efforts.

Overall, this study shows that Pertamina's crisis communication strategy during the fuel controversy reflected a combination of SCCT response approaches. The organization initially applied diminish strategies to manage uncertainty, followed by rebuild strategies to demonstrate accountability, and supported these efforts through bolstering communication and external stakeholder validation.

Effective response to anticipate crisis communication requires strategic alignment between crisis responsibility, response selection, and stakeholder expectations. Involvement of independent stakeholders plays an important role in strengthening credibility and supporting reputation recovery.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The present study examined Pertamina's crisis communication strategies during the fuel controversy in February 2025 using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) framework. Through qualitative content analysis of eight communication events (CE01–CE08), the study identified how Pertamina managed stakeholder concerns, responded to reputational risks, and utilized external stakeholder involvement to strengthen communication credibility.

Communication analysis from Pertamina adopted a multi-strategy crisis communication approach consisting of diminish, rebuild, and bolstering strategies. During the initial stage of the crisis, Pertamina primarily applied diminish strategies through clarification and technical explanations to reduce uncertainty and address public concerns. As the crisis developed, the organization incorporated rebuild strategies through accountability messages, public acknowledgment, and corrective commitments aimed at restoring stakeholder confidence.

Importance highlights is the external stakeholder validation in crisis communication. The involvement of technical authorities, government institutions, and stakeholder representatives contributed to strengthening information credibility and reducing uncertainty among stakeholders. This finding demonstrates that crisis communication effectiveness is not determined solely by organizational messages but also by the broader communication environment involving credible external actors. Understanding from a managerial perspective, this study emphasizes that organizations, particularly those operating in strategic public sectors, should develop crisis communication strategies that combine rapid clarification, accountability, corrective action, and stakeholder engagement. Organizations should avoid relying exclusively on defensive responses and instead adopt adaptive communication approaches that address both factual concerns and stakeholder expectations.

Theoretical perspective from this study extends the application of SCCT by demonstrating that crisis response effectiveness involves not only selecting appropriate organizational strategies but also managing relationships with external stakeholders who influence public interpretation of the crisis. The findings support the propositions that crisis responsibility, response strategy alignment, transparency, and external validation are important factors in reputation recovery.

The results suggest that effective crisis communication requires strategic alignment between crisis conditions, organizational response strategies, and stakeholder expectations. Pertamina's case demonstrates that combining SCCT-based response strategies with credible external validation can support reputation management and strengthen stakeholder confidence during a public crisis.

Despite the contributions several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. Analysis was limited to official crisis communication issued by Pertamina together with statements from government institutions and key stakeholders during the 2025 fuel controversy. Although these sources represent authoritative communication, they do not fully reflect the broader public discourse surrounding the crisis. Public reactions expressed through social media, online communities, and other digital platforms were beyond the scope of this research. Qualitative content analysis was selected to identify crisis response strategies based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of communication patterns but does not evaluate the statistical effectiveness of individual response strategies in restoring public trust or improving corporate reputation.

This study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. It relies on qualitative document analysis and examines publicly available communication materials, data findings reflect organizational communication strategies rather than direct stakeholder perceptions. Research focuses on a single crisis case involving Pertamina, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries or organizational contexts.

Future research may conduct comparative studies across different industries, such as banking, aviation, healthcare, or telecommunications, to examine variations in crisis response strategies. Next research may use quantitative approaches, including stakeholder surveys, social media sentiment analysis, or reputation measurement models, to evaluate the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies in influencing public trust and organizational reputation.

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