

Official website usage by university in crisis communication: Case study from Islamic University of Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss about crisis communication activities using official website in educational organizations. The case of this paper is how Islamic University of Indonesia (UII) responding the crisis following the death of three students in UII freshman orientation program. The data of this research using UII official statement that posted in the university official website between 23 January 2017- 31 January 2017. The consideration to choose the time frame because it was the most critical moment for UII. The discussion using crisis communication concept by Coombs (2006): the form and the content. Form is what organization should do, and content is what kind of message that organization state in order to respond crisis. In the form aspects, UII use the official website to share the official statement immediately; and practice the partial openness. In the content aspects, UII use the acceptance strategy that consist of full apology and remediation

Keywords: crisis communication; cyber public relations; educational organizations; official website;

1. Introduction

In late January 2017, crisis strikes Islamic University of Indonesia (UII) following the death of three students in the university's freshman orientation that held in Mount Lawu, Central Java. This case --obviously-- give negative effect for UII. Public raise questions about "whats really going on?", "how could this happen?", "who is the murder(ers)??", and "how university's responsibility in this case??. In several days, the press/mass media coverage is focused on this case. It make the death of the students become national issues. In the other side, the government also prepare the investigation. In this high pressure condition, the rector and vice-rector of UII step down from his position as an act of responsibility.

There are several characteristic of crisis in this case (written with : "Tragedi Mapala UII" hereafter). UII has no experience face the case like this so this case have "surprising" and "non-routine" element. This case threatening the reputation of organization; it requires the immediately response from organization; the need for the information is very high; and it has disturb the organization activities to reach their main goals (Argenti, 2009; Ulmer, *et.al.*, 2011; Kriyantono, 2012).

In managing crisis, organizations only have a narrow window of media opportunity --" from as little as 40 minutes to a maximum of 12 hours"-- to tell their side of the story (Pinsdorf, as cited from Prastya, 2011). The time range context is to give explanation to the media (or journalist). In the internet era, I assume the time frame become narrower. Because in the internet era, publics also can communicate directly to the organization. In the other side, publics also can make an "online discussion" about the case. It means, the crisis communication in internet era make organization face more challenging situations. In the other side, the internet make this crisis is getting complex. The rumours about this case spreads in the social media rapidly. Sometimes, the rumors led by the posting by anonymous account.

The presence of internet has influence the practice of Public Relations (written with PR hereafter), including crisis communication. Crisis communication activities in internet era should deal with 24/7 information cycle and the fast pace of information. Organization should give a quick and effective responses when they face crisis. When organization failed to give quick response, it means the organization threatened by the loss and/or damage. If they do not announce relevant information within this time frame, the public may discount the credibility of the infomration they eventually disseminate (as cited from Prastya, 2011)

One kind of internet is official website. In crisis situation, official website make organization possible to post official statement in details, complete, and any time (Dewa Broto, 2014; McLennan & Howell, 2011). The official website usage then analyzed by two elements of crisis management: form and content (Coombs, 2006). To analyzed the trend of content, I use the crisis message strategies (Ulmer, *et.al.*, 2011; Cornelissen, 2011).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Crisis in Educational Organization

Although crisis “could strikes any kind of organization” (Barton, as cited from Putra, 1999, p.86) but the discussion about crisis is “dominated by case in profit organization and business sector” (Gainey, 2010, p.301). It is worth noting that educational organization is vulnerable with the crisis. There are several possibilities of crisis that could strikes the educational organizations. For example: violent (e.g shooting in school), curriculum changes, text scores, financial issue, or discipline matters (e.g. plagiarism that forced several lecturer, teachers or educational staff resign). The causes can escalate into full-blown crises if ignored (Gainey, 2010, p.305-306).

In Indonesia, the public relations research related crisis in educational organization relatively rare. Research by Ariani (2016) find there are disharmony between the Gadjah Mada University (UGM) and its publics --in this case the students and the traders-- following the universities decision to relocated a cafeteria . Therefore, the issue could lead to a negative perception of the public towards the university. This study shows that public relations of has practice issues management. But in its implementation do not yet have a standard procedure. The university public relations need to developed the ability in issues management, so that it can be responsive in dealing with issues or changes.

2.2 Crisis Communication in The Internet Era

There are several advantages for PR for using internet in crisis management. Nowadays internet based communication has become the integral part of organizational communciation. Social media have potential to spread a news – range from rumor until not valid information that purpose to damage the organization credibility – with fast pace.

Internet give organization opportunities to protect positive information and prevent negative information by posted official message in critical time. By using their own official new media account, organization can posted the details and complete official statement (Dewa Broto, 2014, p.194-195). One kind of internet feature is website. McLennan & Howell (2011) said, in crisis situation, corporate website make communication between organization ant the media (and public) become more effective and efficient. Organization can use corporate website as communication channel to clarify the wrong information.

According to scholars, integrate the internet in crisis communication strategies is a must. If organization did not response the crisis via internet, public and media will think the organization said “no comment” for the crisis happened (Prastya, 2011).

According to Gainey (2010, p.313-315) there are various practices in the usage of internet by educational organizations in crisis situation. Internet uses for sharing information and make two-way communication with stakeholders; others have yet to fully utilize the interactive capabilities of the new media to more fully engage diverse stakeholders. But in the other side, there are several educational organization using websites just to create a presence on the Web rather than emphasizing interactivity to facilitate engagement with stakeholders.

2.3 Crisis Communication: Form Element

Form indicates what should be done. When analyzing the crisis communication management/literature, three form lessons consistently appear: be quick, be consistent, and be open. Being quick is the most commonly recited lesson. The objective is to fill infomation vacuum with accurate information. Giving the who, what, how, when, why, and where as quickly as possible is crucial to a company’s crisis management objectives. A slow response allows others to fill the vacuum with speculation and/or misinformation. Those others could be ill informed or could use the opportunity to attack the organization A quick response is an active response because it tries to fill the vacuum with facts. A quick response may also help to create the perception that the organization is in control of the crisis situation. (Coombs, 2006; Borda & Mackey-Kallis, 2004).

The second form lesson, “be consistent”, requires that the various messages sent by an organization are free of contradiction. Consistency is another name for speaking with one voice. It is not always possible nor desirable for one person to speak for an organization during a crisis. However, the crisis team must work to insure that different spokespersons, whom may be at different geographic locations, deliver a consistent message. Inconsistency erodes the believability of a message (Coombs, 2006, p.173)

The third form lesson is openness. There are two different interpretations about openness – as the third form lesson: partial disclosure and full disclosure. Partial disclosure simply refers to organizational members being available to stakeholders for comment on the crisis. The crisis team is willing to talk to stakeholders, pirmarily the mass media. Full disclosure means the organization should tell stakeholders everything they know about the crisis as soon as the organization receives the information. Organizations must consider several factors

such as organizational financial interests, stakeholders safety, relationship with stakeholders, legal interests, to decide whether they are practice the partial or full disclosure (Coombs, 2006, p173).

2.4 Crisis Communication: Content Element

The second categories is *content*, means what is actually said in the messages. For example, crisis managers are urged to express sympathy for crisis victims. Discussions of various options for responding to a crisis are scattered across the crisis communication literature. The most detailed discussion of crisis response strategies are found in the work on corporate apologia, corporate impression management, and image restoration theory (Cornelissen, 2011; Coombs, 2006; Ulmer, 2011).

What organization actually said is depend on the degree to which the organization is perceived by stakeholders and the general public to be responsible or culpable fo the crisis. When the perception is that the organization is not directly responsible or culpable, the organization may attempt to distance itself from the crisis or deny thath the crisis exists or is as serious as external actors make it out to be. On the other hand, when the organization is seen as directly responsible or culpable for the crisis, the organization will have to defend its position or may simply have to apologize for the crisis and change its behavior (Cornelissen, 2011, p.203).

3. Method

This research using observation to know how the form ; and content analysis to analyse the content of the official message by Islamic University of Indonesia. Content analysis toward official statement could make us know how organization response an issue, and how the positioning of the organization in an issue (Prastya, 2016). The data is the official statement of UII that posted on their official website: www.uui.ac.id

4. Result and Discussion

One kind of crisis that hit educational organization is violent (Gainey, 2010). In the “Tragedi Mapala UII”, the actor of the violent is the student, and the victim also the student. The crisis is happened outside the campus area. The type of this crisis is *accident*, means an unintentional action and happen during the course of normal organizational operations. For particular, this is human-induced errors. In human-induced errors, public and stakeholders have a tendencies to blame and react negatively to the organization (Cornelissen, 2011, p.202-203).

I divided this chapter into two parts: *the form* and *the content*. The principal of *form* is be quick, be open, and be consistent (Coombs, 2006). Related to quick component, organization just have a very limited time to give their official response, especially in the first phase of the crisis (Prastya, 2011). A quick response by organization could affect the public opinion that the organization handle the crisis appropriately (Coombs, 2006; Borda & Mackey-Kallis, 2004).

The presence of the internet support this *be quick* principal. By using the internet, organization can posted official statement in critical time. This official statement could reduce the public uncertainty, clarify the wrong issue, and prevent negative information. One kind of the internet is organization official website. In crisis situation, official website make communication between organization and the public (and media) become more effective and efficient (Dewa Broto, 2014; McLennan & Howell, 2011). There are six official statement that being posted between 23 January – 31 January 2017. The incident itself happen between 20-22 January 2017. The distribution and the content of the official statement, see **Table 1 on Appendix**

There is interesting discussion about the principal of *be quick*. In crisis situation, organization should communicate “early and often” (Argenti, 2009, p.281) and this organization could do this by using the internet (Dewa Broto, 2014; McLennan & Howell, 2011). From the evidence, UII did not use the internet to communicate often. There are no official statement (related to the TGC 2017) posted on www.uui.ac.id between 26 January 2017-28 January 2017. For additional information, between 26 January 2017-28 January 2017 there are several important moment. For example the press conference held by the Mapala UII (UII freshman) and their lawyers. This press conference is being held on UII building. This press conference of Mapala UII raise questions: how come the banned organization use the campus activities?. Another important moment is the statement of Mr Harsoyo (rector of UII) to step down from his position. He stated in front of the Minister of Research and Higher Education of Indonesia.

So, how the “early and often” means? How the be quick principal practices? Does the organizations must posted official statement every time? Related to this case, we can reflect on what Malaysian Airlines did in crisis communication related to the missing of flight MH370. Malaysian Airlines posted official statement in their official website, almost everyday. According to my personal chat with several Malaysian communication

scholar, they did not impress with what Malaysian Airlines did. They think Malaysian Airlines give too much information, but the content of the information is not fulfil the public desire.

How about the element of openness and consistent? In the openness, UII practice the partial disclosure. It means, the organizational members being available to give explanation for stakeholders (Coombs, 2006). It shows from one official statement that contains the information about the personal contact for the organization spoke person (posted on: Temuan Awal dan Perkembangan Investigasi Kegiatan The Great Camping (TGC), 24 January 2017, arsip.uui.ac.id).

In consistency element, based on UII official statement that posted on www.uui.ac.id, there are two spoke person. The first is the rector of UII, and the second is the internal investigation team (act on behalf UII). The content is also consistent about the UII commitment to resolve the problem, to take responsibility, and their deepest condolence and apology for the public.

In the content element, an organization must consider the public's and stakeholders' perception about organization: to be responsible or culpable for the crisis (Cornelissen, 2011, p.203). In UII case, public's demand UII (as the university) to take responsibility following the death of three parcitipants of TGC 2017.

UII use the full apology and remediation strategy in their official statement related to TGC. Full apology means the organization simply apologizing for the crisis and accepting the blame; remediation means organization announcing some form of compensation or help to victims; This communication strategy is practice when organization face high perception of high level of responsibility from the public (Cornelissen, 2011, p.204).

In their official statement, UII always stated their deepest condolence, deepest sorry for the incident and UII ready to take responsibility. UII also do not hide the fact that there are several violence happen in the TGC 2017. For summary of the official statement, see table 1.

Table 1. Official Statement from UII related to The 2017 The Great Camping (TGC) Mapala UII

Date	Title	Resume of The Official Statement
23 January 2017	Pernyataan Resmi UII terkait Kegiatan The Great Camping oleh MAPALA UII (13-20 Januari 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UII confirmed the death of two participants of The TGC Mapala UII - UII express their deepest condolence - UII formed the internal investigation team - UII stated their commitment to disclose every fact that they have find
24 January 2017	Temuan Awal dan Perkembangan Investigasi Kegiatan The Great Camping (TGC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UII confirmed that one participant dies in the following day. It makes the victim become three participants dies - UII apologize to the public for this incident - UII stated to give their full responsibility - UII confirmed that initial result from internal investigation team finds that there are violence act indication - UII ready to work with police to resolve the problem - UII provide the crisis centre - UII facilitate the medical check-up for another participants from TGC 2017
24 January 2017	PERKEMBANGAN PERISTIWA KEGIATAN THE GREAT CAMPING (TGC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UII stated that their main priority is give assistance to the family of the participant TGC, especially for the next of kin family - UII stated that they keep on contact with another stakeholder such as police and state educational authority - UII confirmed that there are violence act - UII decide to banned the university's freshman organization (Mapala UII) - UII decide to forbid the outdoor activities that held by student organizations
25 January 2017	TINDAK LANJUT UII TERKAIT KEGIATAN THE GREAT CAMPING (TGC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UII stated that their main priority is give assistance to the family of the participant TGC, especially for the next of kin family - UII stated that they keep on contact with another stakeholder such as police and state educational authority - UII confirmed that there are viloenc act - UII decide to banned the university's freshman organization (Mapala UII)

Date	Title	Resume of The Official Statement
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UII decide to forbid the outdoor activities that held by student organizations - UII stated that TGC Mapala UII is voluntary activities. It means, this activities is not mandatory for all UII student
29 January 2017	Harsoyo : Tetap Berjuang Walau Tanpa Baju Pimpinan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Harsoyo (the rector of UII) stated that his decision to step down from his position as responsibility act. This decision made voluntary and there is no pressure and influences from any other parties - This resignation does not affect his (Mr Harsoyo) commitment to resolve the problem. He is ready to give any assistance that needed to figure this case out.
30 January 2017	HASIL RAPAT SENAT DAN PROGRES TIM PENCARI FAKTA THE GREAT CAMPING (TGC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The senate of the university agreed the resignation request from Mr Harsoyo (rector) and Mr Abdul Jamil (vice-rector) - The internal investigation team still work to complete the evidence - UII said that the arrest of two suspected murderers (one is active student of UII and another is UII alumni) is the authority of the police. UII respect the authority.

5. Conclusion

Internet give organization alternative for communication channel in crisis communication. Internet give organizations facilities to upload message as immediately as possible. One kind of internet service is website. Organizations can explain their “own story” via corporate website. Public can read the explanation clearly in corporate website. It is different if organization just give statement to the mass media and/or journalist. Because, the mass media (sometimes) write or present the official statement based on their frame. It means, corporate website could become important communication channel in crisis situation.

There are several lessons learned from the “Tragedy Mapala UII”. *First*, university, school, and educational organization should be ready to face a crisis. Because, officially they do not have formal manual plan to deal with the crisis (Ariani, 2016). This research shows that educational organization is also vulnerable to the crisis. *Second*, every organization should involve the internet usage in their crisis communication strategy. The common thing that occurs is organization just use the website or social media (just) as a medium (tools) to communicate the official statement. In the other side, organization can use the social media to observe the environment, to know how “netizens” discuss about the organization (Ulmer, et.al, 2011). It is worth noting that “companies must recognize the increasing influence of the Internet on a growing number of its constituencies and must keep this dimension in mind in planning for and handling crises (Argenti, 2009, p.271)

6. Limitations and Further Research

This paper only discusses about official website usage. This means, this paper does not discuss about another corporate new media or social media channel such as Twitter, Facebook, etc. usage by UII. Website has several handicaps, for example website is relatively difficult to make a two-way communication and/or interactive dialogue between organization and the public. It is worth noting that corporate website is not suited to support the interactivity between organization and its publics. The communication pattern using website is one way (Idris, 2010)

For the further research, I recommended the usage of corporate social media (e.g Facebook, Twitter, etc) as channel for crisis communication. Because social media offers interactivity, two-way communication, between the organizations and its public. In crisis situation, the need of information is so high. On a broader context, organization could build relationship and engagement with publics through social media. According to Argenti (2009), internet makes organizations can communicate directly with the public; *vice versa*.

This paper also only uses the message that posted on official website as the data. For the further research, I advised to describe how the public relations of the organizations operate their internet-based media (website, social media) in crisis communication.

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