

The Dual Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication: Evidence from a Sexual Harassment Case on Indonesia's Commuter Line

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed organizational crisis communication by enabling real-time interactions between institutions and stakeholders. Although previous studies have examined social media as a platform for crisis response, limited attention has been given to its dual role in both escalating and resolving crises, particularly in cases of sexual harassment in public transportation. This study investigates the role of social media in crisis communication through the sexual harassment case involving PT KAI Commuter in Indonesia and examines how digital communication strategies influenced stakeholder perceptions and organizational legitimacy. A qualitative case study approach was employed using semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, official organizational statements, social media content, and online news reports. Data were analyzed thematically and interpreted through the lens of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The findings reveal that social media played a dual role during the crisis. An insensitive response posted on the organization's official social media account intensified public criticism and escalated the incident into a broader reputational crisis. However, the same platform later facilitated organizational recovery through apologies, corrective actions, transparent communication, and stakeholder engagement that helped rebuild public trust. These results demonstrate that effective crisis communication depends not only on timely responses but also on empathy, accountability, and transparency. This study extends SCCT by conceptualizing social media as both a catalyst for crisis escalation and a mechanism for crisis recovery. It also offers practical insights for transportation authorities and public relations practitioners seeking to develop victim-centered and digitally responsive crisis communication strategies.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way organizations communicate with their stakeholders, particularly during periods of crisis. Social media has evolved beyond its traditional role as a networking platform into a strategic communication channel that enables organizations to disseminate information, engage with audiences, and manage their reputation in real time. Unlike conventional media, social media facilitates interactive and participatory communication, allowing users to simultaneously become consumers and producers of information. This transformation has significantly altered how crises emerge, spread, and are managed in contemporary society (Weeks & Holbert, 2013; Chen et al., 2020; Ruiz-Dodobarra et al., 2024).

The increasing reliance on social media has also changed public expectations regarding organizational accountability and responsiveness. Information can spread globally within minutes, making organizations more vulnerable to reputational risks when communication is delayed, inconsistent, or inappropriate. Consequently, crisis communication has become an essential component of organizational management, requiring transparency, empathy, and timely responses to maintain stakeholder trust. According to Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), organizations should adopt communication strategies that match stakeholders' perceptions of crisis responsibility in order to minimize reputational damage and facilitate organizational recovery (Coombs, 2014). Recent

developments in SCCT further emphasize that emotions such as moral outrage and public perceptions amplified through social media significantly influence the effectiveness of crisis response strategies (Coombs & Tachkova, 2023).

In the digital era, social media has become one of the primary platforms through which individuals report public service failures and demand institutional accountability. Victims who encounter barriers in formal reporting mechanisms increasingly rely on online platforms to seek public attention and support. This phenomenon is particularly evident in cases of sexual harassment occurring in public transportation systems, where victims often experience difficulties obtaining immediate protection or justice. The viral nature of social media enables individual experiences to rapidly evolve into public debates, placing transportation providers under intense scrutiny and creating substantial reputational challenges.

Indonesia represents an important context for understanding this phenomenon due to its high level of social media engagement. With millions of active users on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, public complaints can quickly gain widespread attention and influence organizational legitimacy. In such circumstances, the ability of organizations to respond effectively through digital communication channels becomes increasingly important. Social media therefore functions not only as a medium for disseminating information but also as a mechanism for crisis management, stakeholder engagement, and reputation recovery (Chen et al., 2020; Wigley & Zhang, 2011).

A prominent example occurred when a passenger experienced sexual harassment on Indonesia's Commuter Line and subsequently expressed dissatisfaction with the handling of the incident by station personnel through Twitter. Rather than receiving an empathetic response, the official Commuter Line social media administrator replied in a manner perceived by the public as insensitive and dismissive. The response rapidly generated widespread criticism, attracted extensive media attention, and developed into a reputational crisis for PT KAI Commuter. The organization was subsequently required to issue a public apology, impose sanctions on the administrator involved, and publicly demonstrate its commitment to supporting the victim. This incident illustrates how organizational communication on social media can simultaneously escalate a crisis and serve as an instrument for restoring public trust.

Beyond the operational function of disseminating information, social media has increasingly become an arena where organizations negotiate legitimacy and accountability during crises. Digital platforms enable stakeholders to publicly evaluate organizational actions, amplify dissatisfaction, and mobilize collective responses that may significantly influence corporate reputation. Consequently, organizations are no longer judged solely by the crisis itself but also by the speed, transparency, empathy, and consistency of their communication strategies. Recent studies indicate that organizations adopting proactive and accommodative communication approaches are more likely to preserve stakeholder trust and mitigate reputational damage than those relying on defensive responses.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provides an important theoretical framework for understanding these dynamics. SCCT proposes that organizations should select crisis response strategies according to stakeholders' attribution of responsibility for the crisis. The framework

categorizes responses into denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering strategies, each carrying different implications for organizational legitimacy and public trust. In situations where organizations are perceived to bear substantial responsibility, accommodative responses such as apology, corrective action, and compensation are generally considered the most effective approaches for restoring reputation. Recent developments of SCCT further argue that emotional factors, particularly moral outrage amplified through social media, substantially shape stakeholders' evaluations of organizational responses and their willingness to forgive institutional failures.

Previous empirical studies consistently demonstrate the growing importance of social media in crisis communication. Research has shown that digital platforms facilitate rapid information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, organizational transparency, and collaborative problem-solving during crises. Bibliometric analyses further reveal that crisis communication scholarship has increasingly shifted toward digital ecosystems, emphasizing online interaction, public participation, and reputation management. Nevertheless, most of these studies have concentrated on corporate scandals, product recalls, political communication, natural disasters, or public health emergencies, while transportation-related crises involving gender-based violence remain relatively underexplored.

Moreover, studies examining sexual harassment generally focus on legal processes, victim experiences, organizational culture, or gender inequality rather than communication strategies adopted by service providers. Limited attention has been devoted to understanding how an organization's own social media interaction may unintentionally trigger a secondary communication crisis that exceeds the original incident itself. Likewise, few studies have explored how organizations subsequently utilize the same digital platform to rebuild legitimacy and public confidence through apology, corrective action, and victim-centered communication.

Despite the growing literature on digital crisis communication, three important gaps remain. First, existing studies have predominantly examined corporate scandals, product recalls, political controversies, and public health crises, leaving sexual harassment incidents in public transportation largely unexplored. Second, previous research rarely investigates situations in which an organization's own social media communication becomes the source of reputational escalation rather than merely a tool for crisis response. Third, limited empirical evidence explains how social media simultaneously functions as both a trigger of organizational crises and a mechanism for restoring legitimacy through corrective communication. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of crisis communication in highly sensitive public service contexts where organizational accountability, victim advocacy, and stakeholder trust intersect.

The growing importance of digital platforms has attracted substantial scholarly attention in crisis communication research. Existing studies consistently demonstrate that social media has transformed organizational crisis management by facilitating rapid information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, and interactive dialogue between organizations and the public (Chen et al., 2020; Upadhyay & Upadhyay, 2023). Furthermore, research grounded in Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

suggests that accommodative response strategies, including apology, corrective action, and transparent communication, are generally more effective in protecting organizational reputation and rebuilding stakeholder trust than defensive strategies, particularly when organizations are perceived to bear responsibility for the crisis (Coombs, 2014; Coombs & Tachkova, 2023; Domschat et al., 2023).

Despite these advances, the existing literature exhibits several important limitations. Most empirical studies have concentrated on corporate scandals, product recalls, public health emergencies, natural disasters, and political crises, while relatively little attention has been devoted to sexual harassment incidents occurring in public transportation settings. Moreover, previous research has primarily examined organizational responses after crises have emerged, providing limited insight into situations where an organization's own communication through social media becomes the catalyst for reputational escalation. The interaction between victim advocacy, online public participation, and organizational legitimacy therefore remains insufficiently explored, particularly in developing countries where digital activism continues to expand rapidly (Ruiz-Dodobara et al., 2024; Upadhyay & Upadhyay, 2023).

Another limitation concerns the conceptualization of social media itself. Existing studies generally position social media as a communication channel used to respond to crises; however, relatively few investigations have examined its dual role as both a trigger of organizational crises and a strategic mechanism for crisis recovery. This perspective is particularly relevant in sensitive cases involving gender-based violence, where public expectations regarding empathy, accountability, and institutional transparency are considerably higher than in conventional service failures. Consequently, further empirical investigation is needed to understand how organizations navigate these complex communication dynamics while maintaining public trust and organizational legitimacy.

To address these research gaps, the present study examines the role of social media in crisis communication through the case of sexual harassment on Indonesia's Commuter Line. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on crisis response after organizational failures have occurred, this research conceptualizes social media as simultaneously functioning as a catalyst for reputational escalation and as a strategic instrument for organizational recovery. By integrating Situational Crisis Communication Theory with perspectives from digital public relations and stakeholder communication, this study extends existing crisis communication literature to the underexplored context of gender-based violence in public transportation services within developing countries.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how social media influenced the evolution of the crisis, how PT KAI Commuter employed digital communication strategies in responding to public criticism, and how these strategies contributed to rebuilding organizational credibility and stakeholder trust. Beyond its practical implications, the study contributes theoretically by extending the application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory to transportation-related sexual harassment cases and by demonstrating the dual role of social media as both a catalyst for crisis escalation and a mechanism for organizational recovery in the digital era.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the role of social media in crisis communication during a sexual harassment incident on Indonesia's Commuter Line. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the research aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of organizational communication strategies, stakeholder interactions, and public responses within their real-life context rather than to measure causal relationships quantitatively. Case study methodology enables researchers to investigate complex social phenomena by integrating multiple sources of evidence and examining contextual factors that shape organizational decision-making (Yin, 2018). This study employs an interpretive (Anom, 2026).

The sexual harassment case involving PT KAI Commuter was selected as a single instrumental case because it represents a significant example of how social media simultaneously functioned as a platform for public criticism and an organizational tool for crisis response. The case attracted extensive public attention and generated widespread discussion regarding organizational accountability, victim advocacy, and digital communication practices, making it particularly suitable for examining crisis communication processes in the Indonesian public transportation sector.

Data Collection

Data were collected between April and June 2024 using multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Primary data consisted of semi-structured interviews with communication experts and practitioners who possessed relevant experience in crisis communication, public relations, and digital media management. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their expertise and direct knowledge of communication practices in organizational settings.

Secondary data included official statements issued by PT KAI Commuter, social media posts published through the organization's official Twitter account, online news articles, and publicly accessible digital documents related to the incident. News reports from national media outlets and archived Twitter interactions were examined to reconstruct the chronology of events and identify organizational communication strategies implemented throughout the crisis.

The use of multiple data sources enabled methodological triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings by allowing information obtained from interviews to be compared with documentary evidence and public communications.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, all interview transcripts and documentary materials were read repeatedly

to achieve data familiarization. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments related to crisis communication, organizational response, stakeholder reactions, and reputation management. Third, these codes were organized into broader themes reflecting recurring patterns across data sources.

Subsequently, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure conceptual consistency and relevance to the research objectives. The themes were then defined and interpreted through the lens of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to examine how organizational communication strategies influenced public perceptions and organizational legitimacy during the crisis. Finally, the findings were synthesized into a coherent narrative linking empirical evidence with existing theoretical frameworks and previous studies.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To enhance the rigor and credibility of the research, several strategies were employed. Data triangulation was achieved by combining interviews, social media content, official organizational documents, and news reports. Source triangulation enabled cross-verification of factual information and minimized reliance on a single perspective.

Credibility was further strengthened through continuous comparison between interview findings and documentary evidence. Dependability was supported by maintaining a systematic record of coding procedures and analytical decisions throughout the research process. Confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in empirical evidence rather than researcher assumptions, while contextual descriptions were provided to facilitate transferability of the findings to similar organizational settings.

Ethical Considerations

The study utilized publicly available documents and interviews conducted with informed consent from participants. Personal information unrelated to the research objectives was not disclosed, and data were analyzed solely for academic purposes. Particular attention was given to protecting the identity and dignity of victims involved in the sexual harassment case by avoiding the disclosure of personally identifiable information and emphasizing ethical reporting principles throughout the analysis.

Results

Social Media as a Catalyst for Crisis Escalation

The findings indicate that the initial sexual harassment incident evolved into a broader organizational crisis after the victim's experience was shared on Twitter. Although the original event occurred inside the commuter train, public attention intensified when dissatisfaction with the handling of the complaint was expressed through social media. The viral dissemination of the post generated extensive public

discussion and shifted the focus from the criminal act itself to the quality of PT KAI Commuter's institutional response.

The analysis of online interactions demonstrates that social media functioned as an accelerator of crisis escalation rather than merely as a communication platform. The sarcastic response issued by the official Twitter administrator was perceived by many users as lacking empathy toward the victim, leading to widespread criticism and negative sentiment. As a result, the organization's reputation became increasingly vulnerable as screenshots of the response continued circulating even after the original tweet had been deleted.

Interview findings support this interpretation. According to Jamiluddin (2024), social media has become the primary arena where public complaints are amplified and where organizational responses are immediately evaluated by stakeholders. Similarly, Malik (2024) emphasized that inappropriate digital communication may transform a service complaint into a reputational crisis by attracting extensive public attention.

Organizational Crisis Response and Corrective Actions

Following the public backlash, PT KAI Commuter implemented several corrective measures intended to restore public confidence. The organization issued an official apology through its social media channels, met directly with the victim, imposed sanctions on the administrator responsible for the inappropriate response, and reaffirmed its commitment to supporting legal action against the perpetrator. Documentary evidence also indicates that PT KAI Commuter strengthened its preventive measures by incorporating sketches of perpetrators into the CCTV Analytic database and implementing permanent service bans against confirmed offenders. These actions demonstrate that organizational recovery efforts extended beyond symbolic communication and included operational improvements designed to protect passengers and reinforce accountability. Interview data further suggest that transparent communication and rapid corrective action were perceived as essential components of effective crisis management. Arifin (2024) noted that continuous public communication through social media helped reassure passengers that reports of sexual harassment would receive institutional attention and follow-up.

Stakeholder Reactions and Public Expectations

Public reactions observed across social media platforms reveal that empathy was a dominant expectation among stakeholders during the crisis. Rather than criticizing the existence of the incident alone, many users expressed disappointment regarding the organization's communication style and perceived insensitivity toward the victim. The findings suggest that stakeholders evaluated organizational legitimacy based not only on operational performance but also on communication quality. Even after the controversial tweet was removed, screenshots continued circulating widely, illustrating the

persistence of digital content and its capacity to prolong reputational damage. Interview participants consistently emphasized that organizations operating in digital environments must anticipate immediate public scrutiny and maintain communication standards that prioritize respect, transparency, and victim-centered approaches.

Social Media as a Mechanism for Crisis Recovery

Interestingly, the same platform that accelerated the crisis subsequently became the organization's primary mechanism for crisis recovery. PT KAI Commuter utilized Twitter to communicate apologies, provide updates regarding institutional actions, explain sanctions imposed on personnel, and demonstrate support for victims throughout the legal process. The findings therefore illustrate the dual function of social media in crisis communication. Initially, social media amplified reputational threats by facilitating the rapid spread of negative perceptions. Subsequently, however, it enabled organizational recovery by providing a transparent channel through which corrective actions and accountability measures could be communicated directly to stakeholders. This dual role was consistently reflected in interview data. Informants argued that social media should not merely be viewed as a promotional tool but as a strategic communication infrastructure requiring careful governance, ethical standards, and continuous monitoring to minimize reputational risks.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that social media played a pivotal role throughout the crisis communication process surrounding the sexual harassment case on Indonesia's Commuter Line. Rather than functioning solely as a channel for information dissemination, social media emerged as a dynamic environment where public opinion, organizational accountability, and stakeholder expectations interacted simultaneously. This finding reinforces previous studies suggesting that digital platforms have transformed crisis management by enabling rapid information diffusion, public participation, and immediate evaluation of organizational actions (Jin et al., 2021; Upadhyay & Upadhyay, 2023). Consequently, organizational legitimacy in the digital era is increasingly determined not only by operational performance but also by the effectiveness of communication strategies adopted during crises.

Social Media as a Catalyst for Crisis Escalation

One of the most significant findings of this study is that social media acted as a catalyst that transformed an isolated sexual harassment incident into a broader organizational crisis. Although the original event involved criminal misconduct by an individual perpetrator, public attention rapidly shifted toward PT KAI Commuter's institutional response after the official Twitter administrator posted a reply perceived as insensitive and lacking empathy. The viral dissemination of screenshots and public criticism intensified reputational threats and expanded the scope of the crisis beyond the initial incident.

This finding is highly consistent with Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which argues that stakeholder attribution of organizational responsibility strongly influences reputational outcomes (Coombs, 2014). Even when an organization is not directly responsible for the initiating event, inappropriate responses may increase perceived responsibility and generate secondary reputational crises. Similar conclusions have been reported by Coombs and Tachkova (2023), who argue that moral outrage amplified through social media significantly shapes stakeholder evaluations during organizational crises. Likewise, Sun and Li (2024) found that digital stakeholder engagement substantially influences perceptions of organizational legitimacy and trust.

The present findings also complement previous research by Jin et al. (2021), which emphasizes that social media creates an environment where stakeholder emotions spread rapidly and influence collective judgments. However, unlike earlier studies that focused primarily on corporate scandals or public health emergencies, this research demonstrates that the organization's own digital interaction became the immediate catalyst for reputational escalation within the context of sexual harassment in public transportation. This expands current understanding of crisis communication by illustrating how organizational messaging itself can become the central crisis event.

Organizational Response and the Rebuilding Strategy

Following the escalation of public criticism, PT KAI Commuter adopted several corrective measures that closely resemble the rebuilding strategy described in SCCT. The organization issued an official apology, imposed sanctions on the administrator responsible for the controversial response, met directly with the victim, and communicated its commitment to supporting legal proceedings while strengthening preventive measures.

These actions align with Coombs' (2014) recommendation that organizations facing high stakeholder attribution should adopt accommodative strategies such as apology and corrective action to restore reputation. Domschat et al. (2023) similarly reported that transparent communication combined with organizational accountability significantly improves stakeholder evaluations and facilitates reputation recovery. Frederick et al. (2024) further argue that apology and acknowledgment are particularly important in crises involving sexual misconduct because stakeholders expect organizations to demonstrate empathy and responsibility toward victims.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that corrective actions alone may not immediately eliminate reputational damage in digital environments. Screenshots, reposts, and media coverage preserve controversial communication long after deletion, allowing negative narratives to persist. This observation supports Schneider et al. (2021), who emphasize that digital crises possess prolonged reputational effects due to the permanence and replicability of online content. Therefore, preventive communication governance may be equally important as post-crisis recovery strategies.

Stakeholder Expectations in the Digital Environment

Another important finding concerns stakeholder expectations regarding organizational communication. Public criticism was directed not merely at the occurrence of sexual harassment but primarily at the organization's perceived lack of empathy toward the victim. This suggests that stakeholders increasingly evaluate organizations according to communication quality rather than operational performance alone.

Such findings reflect broader developments in digital public relations where organizations are expected to engage in transparent, participatory, and emotionally appropriate communication (Hallahan, 2004; Liu et al., 2021). Rather than functioning as passive audiences, stakeholders actively participate in constructing organizational legitimacy by sharing information, commenting on official responses, and influencing broader public opinion.

Furthermore, Chen et al. (2020) demonstrate that effective digital engagement enhances public trust through timely interaction and transparency. Similarly, Ruiz-Dodobara et al. (2024) argue that social media facilitates collective action by enabling individuals to mobilize around shared moral concerns. The present findings extend these observations by illustrating that empathy has become an essential expectation in organizational communication involving gender-based violence. Failure to acknowledge stakeholder emotions may therefore intensify reputational risks regardless of subsequent corrective actions.

The Dual Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication

Perhaps the most important contribution of this study is the identification of the dual role of social media within crisis communication. Unlike previous studies that primarily conceptualize social media as a platform for organizational response, the findings demonstrate that social media simultaneously functions as both a catalyst for crisis escalation and a mechanism for organizational recovery.

Initially, social media amplified public dissatisfaction through rapid dissemination of negative organizational interactions. Subsequently, however, the same platform enabled PT KAI Commuter to communicate apologies, provide updates regarding corrective measures, explain institutional reforms, and demonstrate accountability toward stakeholders. This transformation illustrates that the effectiveness of social media depends largely on organizational communication practices rather than on the platform itself.

Although previous research has highlighted the strategic value of digital communication for crisis management (Jin et al., 2021; Upadhyay & Upadhyay, 2023), relatively few studies have explicitly conceptualized social media as simultaneously producing reputational risks and recovery opportunities. The present findings therefore extend SCCT by proposing that organizational social media interactions should be viewed not merely as post-crisis communication tools but also as potential antecedents of crisis escalation. This theoretical extension is particularly relevant for organizations operating in highly sensitive contexts involving victim advocacy and public accountability.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to crisis communication scholarship by extending Situational Crisis Communication Theory into the context of sexual harassment within public transportation systems. Existing SCCT applications have predominantly focused on corporate scandals, product recalls, and public health emergencies (Coombs, 2014; Coombs & Tachkova, 2023). The present research demonstrates that organizational communication itself may become the object of stakeholder attribution and thereby function as a determinant of crisis escalation. By conceptualizing social media as both a catalyst and a recovery mechanism, the study provides a broader understanding of digital crisis dynamics and enriches the application of SCCT in contexts involving gender-based violence and public service organizations.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the necessity for transportation authorities and public relations practitioners to establish comprehensive social media governance policies. Organizations should provide crisis communication training for digital administrators, develop victim-centered communication protocols, and implement continuous monitoring of online public sentiment. As emphasized by Liu et al. (2021), effective stakeholder engagement requires transparency, responsiveness, and empathy throughout the crisis lifecycle. The present study suggests that these principles are particularly important in cases involving vulnerable populations, where communication failures may rapidly undermine institutional legitimacy. Consequently, integrating ethical communication practices with organizational preparedness can strengthen public trust while minimizing reputational risks in increasingly digitalized environments.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of social media in crisis communication through the sexual harassment case involving PT KAI Commuter in Indonesia. By employing a qualitative case study approach and integrating documentary evidence with expert interviews, the research explored how digital communication influenced the development, escalation, and resolution of the crisis. The findings reveal that social media played a decisive role in shaping stakeholder perceptions, organizational legitimacy, and public trust throughout the crisis management process.

A key finding of this study is that social media served a dual function in crisis communication. On one hand, the organization's insensitive response on its official social media account intensified public criticism and transformed an isolated criminal incident into a broader reputational crisis. On the other hand, the same platform became an essential mechanism for recovery by enabling the organization to issue apologies, communicate corrective actions, demonstrate accountability, and engage directly with stakeholders. These findings confirm that the effectiveness of crisis communication depends not only on the speed of organizational responses but also on the empathy, transparency, and appropriateness of the communication itself.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the development of Situational Crisis Communication Theory by extending its application to the context of sexual harassment in public

transportation and by conceptualizing social media as both a catalyst for crisis escalation and a mechanism for organizational recovery. Unlike previous studies that primarily position digital platforms as channels for post-crisis response, the present findings demonstrate that organizational communication through social media may itself become the source of reputational threats when stakeholder expectations are not adequately addressed. This perspective broadens existing understandings of crisis communication within increasingly interactive and participatory digital environments.

Practically, the study provides important implications for transportation operators, public relations practitioners, and public institutions responsible for managing sensitive incidents involving gender-based violence. Organizations should establish comprehensive social media governance policies, provide crisis communication training for digital administrators, implement victim-centered communication protocols, and prioritize transparency and accountability in responding to public concerns. Continuous monitoring of online public sentiment and timely corrective actions are also essential to maintaining organizational credibility and stakeholder trust in the digital era.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis is based on a single case study within the Indonesian public transportation sector and relies primarily on qualitative data obtained from interviews and documentary sources. Consequently, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other organizational contexts or cultural settings. Future research is encouraged to conduct comparative studies across different transportation providers or countries, incorporate mixed-method or quantitative approaches to examine stakeholder perceptions, and further investigate the interaction between digital activism, organizational legitimacy, and crisis communication strategies in cases involving gender-based violence.

Overall, this study demonstrates that social media should no longer be viewed merely as a communication channel but as a strategic environment that can both amplify organizational crises and facilitate recovery. Organizations that successfully integrate empathy, transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement into their digital communication practices are better positioned to preserve legitimacy and rebuild public trust when confronted with highly sensitive crises.

Declarations

Author Contributions (CRediT Taxonomy)

Conceptualisation: Erman Anom, Marhisar simatupang,Erya Puput. Methodology: Erman Anom, Marhisar Simatupang.. Investigation: Erman Anom. Data curation: Erya Puput. Formal analysis: Erman Anom, Marhisar Simatupang. Validation: Marhisar Simatupang, Resources: Erman Anom, Erya Puput. Writing – original draft: Erman Anom. Writing – review and editing: Erman Anom. Project administration: Erman Anom, Tulus Suyatno.Supervision: Erman Anom, Tulus Suyatno

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Data Availability

The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available owing to confidentiality commitments made to interview participants, but they are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All interview participants provided informed consent and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Sensitive data were anonymized during transcription and analysis to protect participant identities, consistent with Indonesia's Law No. 27/2022 on Personal Data Protection. The study received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Esa Unggul, conducted in accordance with Peraturan Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional (BRIN) Nomor 22 Tahun 2022 tentang Klirens Etik Riset (Regulation of the National Research and Innovation Agency Number 22 of 2022 concerning Research Ethics Clearance), Indonesia's national standard governing the ethical clearance of research involving human participants (Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional, 2022). Interviews took place between April and June 2024, and all quotations are reported under the anonymized identifiers in Table.

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