



# Crisis Communication Strategy by Public Relations to Customers in the middle of Covid-19

Hebby Ilma Dini<sup>1,\*</sup> Sri Hastjarjo<sup>2</sup>, Ign. Agung Satyawan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Faculty Social and Political Science, Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author. Email: [hebbyilmad@student.uns.ac.id](mailto:hebbyilmad@student.uns.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic is still in the midst of life, Covid-19 which is spreading globally has an impact on developments in various world sectors, especially in Indonesia. The number of sectors spread across Indonesia has had a large enough influence on the crisis in Indonesia. From the economic crisis, trade, health and much more. The health sector is one of the sectors that has the main interest during the Covid-19 pandemic. How is a crisis communication process in the health sector in the hospital when the spread of the Covid-19 virus continues to increase until the Covid-19 virus declines. The theory used is Situational Crisis Communication Theory. The research method carried out here uses a qualitative approach and data collection techniques through interviews and document collection. The results of this study are the communication strategies carried out by public relations to customers during the Covid-19 pandemic at the Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah Hospital, namely through 3 stages: pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis stage. The first, the pre-crisis stage, communicates with patients in the hospital and with the leadership, a public relations officer can take the role of always doing an intense communication in order to find out information. The second is during a crisis, in this phase it begins by gathering all information about risks and actions that need to be taken when a crisis occurs. And finally, after the crisis, a public relations officer is able to get an evaluation to become a strategy and can be used in the future.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Crisis Communication Strategy, Public Relations, Rumah Sakit Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on life in the world, which is a global health problem. Covid-19 also has an impact in Indonesia. The first time the virus came on December 31, 2019 which was delivered by the World Health Organization (WHO), a new virus was first discovered in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China which then continued to spread outside of China. This Covid-19 outbreak has been declared a global health emergency, then on January 30, 2020, Covid-19 has been declared an International Public Health Emergency (PHEIC). After that on March 11, 2020, Covid-19 was later designated as a Pandemic. For the first time Indonesia had two positive cases of Covid-19 on March 2, 2020. This pandemic of the Covid-19 virus triggered all human activities

Covid-19 continues to spread so that the number of victims in Indonesia has increased from time to time since it was first announced on May 2, 2020. There are recorded data on confirmed cases of Covid-19 as of November 23, 2020, as many as 797,723 and 23,520 with death status, then with recovered status there are

659,437 people [1]. Until June 26, 2021, patients who were exposed to the Covid-19 virus and were positive with available data showed 2,115,305 people [2].

Day by day the cases of Covid-19 continue to increase and have affected the economy of the whole world, one of which is Indonesia. This pandemic which has been determined by the United Nations has an impact on many sectors such as tourism, economy, trade and health. The government issued a policy in the form of "lockdown" or commonly referred to as social distancing, this was also carried out in various countries as one of the preventions for the spread of Covid-19.

Interacting right now should also avoid direct physical contact, this is an obstacle and challenge for many sectors and organizations that were previously accustomed to meeting, discussing directly without social distancing. This is one of the experiences and lessons that are still new for the field of communication and during a pandemic like today, communication is one of the most important things.

Thus, companies and organizations need to be

aware of a potential crisis, this is because no one can predict when a crisis will come or occur. As Ray [3] defines, "crises can happen anytime and anywhere and happen to any company or organization". Therefore, companies and organizations need to have guidelines for dealing with crises, one of which is by communicating and responding well to customers.

In this world there are many sectors, one of which is health. Hospitals during a pandemic like now have a very important role and can even be said to be on the front line during this pandemic. The number of cases that increase every day causes hospitals to have more customers or patients every day to get the best treatment. The surge in the hospital can cause a crisis if it is not communicated properly, because the surge in customers or patients who exceed capacity can cause communication to not run smoothly.

The customer or patient is a person who has an important influence on the continuity of the hospital. Thus, there is a need for coordination and cooperation to be able to deal with the current situation of Covid-19, a situation where it is not stable and to overcome problems that can arise at any time. This is done by public relations who can play a very important role in ongoing crisis communication because it can help make crisis communication strategies work and work effectively [4]. There is a communication team that can provide all the important messages, recommendations and statements that need to be conveyed through the organization to the public during a crisis [5].

Public Relations or public relations has a very important role for the success of a company or in this case for the success of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta Hospital. Public relations itself has a function, namely a function that is in a communication strategy that aims to build and maintain good and beneficial relationships for an organization with the general public or public that can influence the success or failure of an organization (Cutlip, Centr, and Broom, 2006: 6).

After knowing the definition of public relations as above, it can be concluded that public relations or public relations has a very important role to maintain good relations with the general public or the public. Every organization or company definitely needs other parties to achieve existing goals. That way, the existence of public relations can give hope to obtain a strategy that is formed or built to balance the interests of each external and internal party in the organization or company.

When an organization is able to provide a statement that is less accurate or even inaccurate, it can affect the company's image [5]. Thus, the response is so important in effectiveness for crisis communication

strategy efforts, public relations there are many definitions from several experts, but in this case the British Institute of Public Relations mentions the most accepted definition: "Public Relations is able to represent a deliberate effort, then planned and sustainable to be able to maintain and build mutual understanding between the organization and its publics". There is an analysis in the definition, namely in the first word "deliberately", which means that there is a purpose, to influence and direct the course of a crisis, in terms of communication during a crisis.

PKU Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta Hospital, which is arguably the oldest Muhammadiyah hospital in the city of Yogyakarta, belongs to the Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah, founded by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan as the Chairman of the Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah on the initiative of K.H. Sudjak who is a student of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan. Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah Hospital was established on November 18, 1912. So far, Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta Hospital has continued to grow until now. A public relations officer at the hospital has also carried out various strategies to continue to advance this hospital. From its inception until now, PKU Muhammadiyah Hospital has experienced significant development, where currently the reputation at this hospital has a good reputation from patients or customers.

Crises can come at any time without warning and have an unpleasant nature. A crisis is an event in which there is uncertainty and a situation in which the unexpected. Crisis can also damage an organization. Crises are rare but when an organization is not prepared, the impact of this uncertainty can be more severe than the crisis.

In an organization, it is important to know how to warn before a crisis arises, by taking steps in the form of prevention and preparing various procedures that are capable of dealing with crisis situations, pre and post-crisis. This pandemic can have an impact on the health sector, so hospitals cannot just stand still. There needs to be a protocol and strategy as well as a system that can allow hospitals to operate effectively even in a pandemic.

This pandemic can result in a health crisis, where the health of the community can be threatened due to a new virus and the absence of a vaccine that can cure it. This health can clearly have an impact on the hospital which is a place or place to treat this health. The crisis experienced by the hospital is how the hospital is able to deal with the crisis by communicating the crisis well before, during and after the pandemic.

In this case, crisis communication is part of public relations, and can play an important role in an

organization, especially when developing, planning and implementing a crisis communication plan. In organizations to want to survive it is necessary to have and prepare organizations to be able to face crises and be able to develop their strategies and protocols.

During this pandemic situation, organizations also need to be able to face and handle problems (issues) and potential crises that can arise as a result of this pandemic. Researchers need to understand that the existence of failure and success in an organization

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Public Relations Function*

The position of a PR has a very important importance for an organization or company. when a company is experiencing a crisis, PR strategy has a very important role. A PR is the first person to become a place for an individual to develop in every communication process. In this case, because communication can move freely to convey messages, processing, and receiving messages in coloring the interactions of one individual with another individual through the framework of a system in the company or groups with certain interests.

Public relations have a goal, namely the maintenance and formation of mutual understanding (cognitive aspect), forming and maintaining mutual trust (affective aspect) and maintaining and creating cooperation (psymotor aspect). According to Cutlip and Center (2008:64) there are parts and functions of public relations.

First, internal relations. Internal relations is a special part of public relations that builds and maintains good and beneficial relationships between managers and employees where the organization wants to be successful.

Second, publicity. Publicity is the sources of information provided by a public relations officer himself and used by the media because the information has news value. The method of placing a message used in this media is a method that cannot be controlled, because the source of information does not give a fee to the media for loading an information.

Third, advertising. Is information that is used by a public relations officer to reach a wider general audience, where the information is placed in the media by certain sponsors who have clarity in their identities and who pay for the time and space for placing the information. It is a controlled method of placing messages in the media.

Fourth, press agency. That is the creation of news

during a crisis is also determined by how the organization handles and prepares itself before and during a crisis.

The research in this case was conducted in order to find out the crisis communication strategies used by hospitals and to find out how crisis communication can be used and how they are able to manage customers (patients) during conditions before the crisis, during the crisis, and after the crisis took place.

and events that have news value to attract the mass media and get public attention. Public relations usually uses press agency to attract media attention to its clients, organizations, or goals.

Fifth, lobbying. Is a special part of public relations whose function is to maintain and establish relations with the government with the aim of influencing the formulation of laws and regulations.

Sixth, issue management. It is a proactive process of anticipating, identifying, evaluating, and responding to issues in public policy that affect organizations' relationships with their publics. While conceptually issue management is part of the function of public relations, but when viewed as persuasive communication, issue management becomes a tactic in influencing public policy, not part of organizational strategic planning.

### 2.2. *Crisis Communication Strategy*

The theory that can be used in this case is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory, the choice to be able to enrich the crisis communication strategy that can be done by public relations to maintain the reputation of the organization [6]. Activities to deal with crises carried out by a public relations officer are implementing the implementation of crisis communication strategies. Coombs & Holladay provides an explanation of crisis communication strategies that can be used as an effort to prevent or reduce the negative outcomes of a crisis as a protector for the organization and its customers (patients), dividing crisis communication strategies into three parts, namely pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis.

The following describes each stage [5] the first, pre-crisis, which is a stage before a crisis occurs, carried out by collecting all information about crisis risks, being able to determine the response to be made during a crisis and preparing a trusted figure. , which can provide information to the public

Then there is the crisis. Organizations when in a crisis situation, need to provide an appropriate response, so that the crisis can be handled properly. One of the important things that can be used when an

organization is in crisis is the media. Coombs & Holladay explained, namely to deal with communication crises, organizations can use media such as company websites and online media reports, then social networks such as web blogs, twitter, podcasts, youtube and email.

Coombs & Holladay, explained that after the organization carried out a crisis response, it could then be seen how the influence that existed for organizational reputation and intense behavior from the public [5].

Finally, there are stages in crisis management, namely post-crisis. Coombs & Holladay provide an explanation of the post-crisis, namely as learning that can be received by the organization after the crisis. This stage still requires communication, as a way to change and provide messages that can be needed after the crisis occurs [5].

### 3. METHODS

In conducting this research, the researcher uses a qualitative approach, this is because it will describe an event that occurs in social life. According to West & Turner, a qualitative approach can describe details about people, actions, and events that exist in social life [7]. The type of method used is descriptive. To process the descriptive method data, the collected data is processed and then analyzed from certain narratives/phrases/terms that can be taken from descriptive data. Before conducting a study, the researcher formulates a problem in the form of questions that usually begin with the question word "what". Then the data analysis technique here in qualitative research is through the results of interviews, data reduction, analysis and triangulation. The following are some of the speakers that the researcher plans to bring to the discussion: Head of Public Relation/ Humas Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah Hospital, Member of Public Relations Yogyakarta Hospital, Director of Yogyakarta Muhammadiyah Hospital.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1. Crisis Communication Strategy

There are three stages of crisis management: pre-crisis (before the crisis), crisis (crisis occurs), post-crisis (after the crisis). The first is the pre-crisis stage, communicating with patients at the hospital, employees and with the leadership, a public relations officer can take the role of always doing an intense communication in order to find out information. The second is when the crisis in this phase begins, by gathering all information about the risks and actions that need to be taken when

a crisis occurs. And finally, after the crisis, a public relations officer is able to get an evaluation to produce a crisis communication strategy and can be used in the future.

The hospital is one of the companies in the field of health services, namely serving patients who seek treatment at the hospital, of course when Covid-19 is at its peak there is a crisis, as well as complaints that often come in the external environment. Public relations here must be able to handle or provide accurate information when dealing with complaints from external parties, in addition to external parties also a public relations person needs to pay attention to internal parties in order to carry out activities at the hospital properly. Here, a public relations officer applies a crisis communication strategy, namely pre-crisis (before the crisis) so that Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta Hospital is able to handle incoming information from external and internal sources so that complaints can be minimized and resolved properly.

### 4.2. Publicity

Efforts made by a public relations officer are to collaborate with the media, such as print media to electronic media to support publicity. An increase in cooperation with various media is also something that needs to be considered, we as public relations also need to try to cooperate with online media and national media which aims to support the creation of good publicity.

What has been done by Hospital Public Relations according to the Head of Public Relations, namely, establishing good relations with various journalists which is one of the duties of a public relations officer, then the hospital has various kinds of online media from the web, Facebook, to Instagram. This hospital is also still using print media.

#### 4.2.1. Hospital public relations in establishing communication

One of the strategies carried out is through regular meetings, both formal and normal, to bridge misinformation from internal parties, such as focus group discussion activities where from the leadership to staff participate in these activities in order to optimize communication at the hospital so that it is maintained.

Then when you have social media that has not been well integrated, it is necessary to make efforts to integrate it into the hospital website to be one of the things that needs to be done. Through this integration, we can make it easier for us to carry out the monitoring process.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

As for some suggestions that can be given regarding crisis communication strategies by public relations to customers or patients during the covid-19 pandemic, namely as follows, public relations needs to have an active role that aims to communicate various existing communication problems. Thus a public relations officer is able to play an active role in bridging communication and information needs.

Then a support system from the leadership is needed for the development of a public relations performance in order to facilitate public relations in determining strategies for crisis communication. The support system here is not only in the form of material or budget but also morally. Thus there is an active role/involvement of the leadership in every activity/program organized by a public relations officer.

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