



The Functions of Third-Party Communication: Evidence from Political and Celebrity Infidelity Scandals in Indonesia

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Abstract. Third-party actors can play an important role in personal scandals, yet crisis communication research has largely focused on the individual at the center of the crisis. This study examines the functions of third-party communication in infidelity scandals involving Indonesian politicians and celebrities. Using qualitative analysis of 35 publicly reported communicative episodes, the study identifies seven functions: defense, contextualization, disclosure, relational protection, moral intervention, religious meaning-making, and boundary setting. While some functions correspond to established strategies in Image Repair Theory, others extend beyond image repair and responsibility management. The findings also show that relational position does not determine communicative function. Actors in similar positions could support, challenge, contextualize, or complicate the crisis narrative. Third-party interventions could further shift attention from alleged misconduct toward evidence, relationships, morality, religion, or personal change. The study therefore conceptualizes personal crisis communication as a distributed process in which third parties do more than defend the crisis actor. They contribute information, negotiate relationships, establish boundaries, and introduce alternative moral and interpretive perspectives. The findings extend actor-centered approaches to crisis communication by highlighting the varied functions of third-party participation in personal scandals.

Keywords: third-party communication; crisis communication; infidelity scandals; political scandals; celebrity scandals; Indonesia.

1. Introduction

Infidelity scandals involving public figures are not merely private relationship controversies. Once allegations become public, they can threaten reputation, moral standing, professional legitimacy, and, in the case of politicians, political credibility. Research on political sex scandals has shown that the consequences of such scandals depend not only on the alleged misconduct but also on how scandals are communicated, interpreted, and situated within broader political and social contexts [1, 2]. Crisis communication research has consequently examined how public figures respond to

allegations through strategies such as denial, responsibility management, and image repair [3–5].

This literature, however, has largely privileged the response of the crisis actor—the individual whose reputation is directly threatened by the allegation. Studies of political sex scandals have similarly tended to examine politicians' statements, responses, and reputational recovery [1, 5]. Yet public scandals can also generate participation from actors surrounding the person at the center of the crisis. Padgett [6], examining the Kwame Kilpatrick text-message scandal, demonstrates that third parties, including advocates, victims, media actors, and adjudicators, can become functional participants in scandal discourse rather than observers. Millner, Veil, and Sellnow [7] likewise show that third parties may fill an information void and provide instructing, adjusting, and reputation-management messages when the primary actor responds inadequately. These studies suggest that crisis discourse may involve communicative actors beyond the individual whose reputation is directly at stake.

Research on political spouses further illustrates the importance of actors surrounding the scandalized figure. Mandell [8] found that political wives, even when largely silent, could function symbolically within the scandal script, being read simultaneously as signs of support and shame. Martin and Mandell [9] similarly showed how images of spouses could participate in public narratives of penance, remedy, and resolution. Mahmood [10] extended this perspective by examining wives' supportive roles in media coverage of political sex scandals. Although these studies do not necessarily treat all forms of spousal participation as verbal communication, they demonstrate that proximate actors can become consequential participants in the public construction of a scandal. Together, this literature broadens the analytical focus from what the scandalized individual says to how actors surrounding that individual participate in scandal discourse.

Third-party involvement may work beyond amplifying or relaying the crisis actor's response. Smith and Connable [11], for example, found that evangelical leaders defended Donald Trump during the Stormy Daniels scandal by employing image-repair strategies including minimization, transcendence, bolstering, denial, and attack of the accuser. Third parties may also advocate for the accused or perform other functions in the public deliberation of scandal [6]. Furthermore, recent research on celebrity crisis communication found that communication by an agency can complicate crisis positioning and reputation management [14]. Such findings complicate an actor-centered understanding of crisis communication: third parties may support the crisis actor, but their interventions may also provide information, interpret events, or contribute to competing accounts of the scandal. Third-party communication, therefore, cannot be assumed to be merely a proxy for the crisis actor's own response.

This multivocal understanding is consistent with Rhetorical Arena Theory (RAT), which conceptualizes crisis communication as an arena in which multiple voices can interact, compete, support one another, and negotiate interpretations of a crisis [12, 13]. RAT provides a useful perspective for examining who enters the crisis discourse and how different actors contribute to its construction. However, existing research provides less insight into the communicative functions performed by third parties when they intervene in personal scandals. Previous studies have documented support, symbolic participation, advocacy, and image repair, but less attention has been given to interventions that disclose information, provide contextualization, protect interpersonal

relationships, establish boundaries, address moral responsibility, or interpret the crisis through religious meanings.

Against this background, this study examines third-party communication in infidelity scandals involving Indonesian politicians and celebrities. The study defines third-party communicators as actors other than the crisis actor who publicly intervene in the crisis discourse from a relational, institutional, professional, political, or social position. This study therefore asks: What communicative functions do third-party actors perform in the public communication of infidelity scandals involving Indonesian politicians and celebrities? By focusing on the functions of third-party interventions rather than audience effects or message effectiveness, the study seeks to extend crisis communication research beyond an actor-centered model toward a more distributed understanding of how personal scandals are publicly communicated, contested, and negotiated.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design and Data

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine third-party communication in infidelity scandals involving Indonesian politicians and celebrities. Qualitative content analysis enables textual material to be examined inductively to identify patterns emerging from the data, while existing theoretical concepts can subsequently inform deductive interpretation [15].

The corpus consisted of online news reports documenting third-party communication across 13 infidelity cases involving Indonesian public figures. The reports covered the period from July 2008 to 2025. This temporal range defines the boundary of the corpus rather than constituting an analytical variable; the study does not examine changes in third-party communication over time.

Cases were selected purposively when they met three criteria: (1) the case involved a publicly reported infidelity allegation or controversy; (2) the crisis actor was an Indonesian politician or celebrity who was married at the time of the alleged infidelity; and (3) available online news reports contained an identifiable public communication or intervention by an actor other than the crisis actor. The final corpus comprised 35 communicative episodes.

A *communicative episode* refers to a publicly reported communication or intervention by a third party in relation to a scandal. The unit was not restricted to a single quotation. When several statements formed part of the same intervention and served the same communicative purpose, they were treated as one episode. This approach allowed the analysis to capture interventions reported across multiple statements without artificially fragmenting a single communicative act.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Relevant reports were identified through online searches using the names of public figures, alleged partners, third-party communicators, and terms associated with the scandals. Reports were included when they documented an identifiable third-party intervention. The analysis focused on what third parties communicated, their position

in relation to the crisis actor, and the function performed by their intervention, rather than on audience responses or message effectiveness.

Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, each communicative episode was coded for the third-party communicator, network position, communicative function, and interpretive frame. The communicative function captured what the intervention did within the crisis discourse, whereas the frame captured the principal lens through which the crisis was interpreted, such as factual, legal, relational, political, moral, or religious. This distinction allowed an intervention to perform one function while drawing on a particular interpretive frame. For example, an intervention could protect a relationship through a relational frame or interpret a crisis through religious meanings while simultaneously serving a relational purpose.

Table 1. Communicative functions and operational meanings

Communicative function	Operational meaning
Defense	Reject, weaken, or challenge allegations against the crisis actor
Contextualization	Provide additional information or alternative explanations
Disclosure	Introduce or confirm information relevant to the crisis
Relational protection	Protect or maintain an interpersonal relationship
Moral intervention	Address responsibility, wrongdoing, improvement, or forgiveness
Religious meaning-making	Interpret the crisis through religious values, beliefs, or authority
Boundary setting	Limit involvement, discussion, or escalation of the crisis

Second, related initial codes were compared and grouped into seven broader communicative functions: defense, contextualization, disclosure, relational protection, moral intervention, religious meaning-making, and boundary setting. The categories were retained when they captured a recurring communicative purpose across the corpus and were conceptually distinguishable from one another. Table 1 summarizes their operational meanings.

Third, the coded functions were examined across different network positions, including spouses, family members, lawyers, political actors, religious actors, and members of wider social networks. This comparison considered how relational and institutional positions provided different resources, relationships, and forms of access for third-party participation. Network position was treated as a contextual condition rather than a deterministic explanation of communicative function.

Fourth, the coded functions were compared with established crisis communication frameworks, particularly Image Repair Theory (IRT) to identify points of overlap and extension. RAT was used as a broader interpretive lens for understanding how multiple actors entered the crisis discourse from different positions within the crisis arena [12, 13].

Table 2. Corpus of Third-Party Crisis Communication

No.	Crisis actor	Third-party communicator	Network	Communicative function	Frame
1	Gus Dur	Wahyu Muryadi	Institutional	Defense	Political/ institutional
2	Gus Dur	Khofifah Indar Parawansa	Political/ government	Defense	Moral/social
3	Gus Dur	Alwi Shihab	Political/ religious	Defense	Religious/ moral
4	Gus Dur	Ahmad Bagdja	Religious/ political	Contextualization	Political
5	Gus Dur	Sholahuddin Wahid	Family	Defense	Political
6	Gus Dur	Dien Syamsuddin / MUI	Religious institution	Moral intervention	Religious
7	Moerdiono	Budi Santoso	Family	Defense	Legal/factual
8	Moerdiono	Widji Wisesa	Family	Contextualization	Legal/factual
9	Moerdiono	Oni Joyo Priantono	Family	Defense	Legal/factual
10	Yahya Zaini	Sarmila	Spouse	Relational protection	Family/ religious
11	Zumi Zola	Selamat Sibagariang	Legal/ professional	Defense	Legal
12	Arzeti Bilbina	Aditya Setiawan (Didit)	Spouse	Defense	Political/ relational
13	Arzeti Bilbina	Lukman Edy	Political	Defense	Political
14	Azwar Anas	Hasto Kristiyanto / PDI-P	Political/ party	Defense	Political
15	Azwar Anas	Ipuk Festiandani	Spouse	Relational protection	Relational
16	Ridwan Kamil	Ayu Aulia	Social network	Contextualization	Factual/ relational
17	Ridwan Kamil	Muslim Jaya Butar Butar	Legal/ professional	Defense	Legal
18	Cut Tari	Hotman Paris	Legal/ professional	Defense	Legal
19	Cut Tari	Yusuf Subrata	Intimate/ family	Relational protection	Relational/ evidentiary
20	Cut Tari	Yusuf Subrata	Intimate/ family	Boundary setting	Relational/ procedural
21	Gisel	Sandy Arifin	Legal/	Defense	Legal/

No.	Crisis actor	Third-party communicator	Network	Communicative function	Frame
22	Gisel	Sandy Arifin	professional Legal/ professional	Boundary setting	reputational Legal/ procedural
23	Gisel	Wijin	Intimate/ romantic	Relational protection	Relational
24	Gisel	Wijin	Intimate/ romantic	Religious meaning-making	Religious/ relational
25	Syahnaz Shadiqa	Jeje Govinda	Spouse	Relational protection	Relational/ family
26	Syahnaz Shadiqa	Jeje Govinda	Spouse	Boundary setting	Relational/ family
27	Syahnaz Shadiqa	Raffi Ahmad	Family	Moral intervention	Moral/ relational
28	James Arthur	Michaela Elsiana Paruntu	Spouse	Relational protection	Religious/ relational
29	James Arthur	Michaela Elsiana Paruntu	Spouse	Moral intervention	Religious/ moral
30	James Arthur	Michaela Elsiana Paruntu	Spouse	Boundary setting	Relational
31	Ayus	Fadhila	Family	Disclosure	Factual/ relational
32	Nissa Sabyan	Haji Komar	Family	Defense	Factual/ family
33	Krisdayanti	Yuni Shara	Family	Contextualization	Factual/ relational
34	Krisdayanti	Yuni Shara	Family	Relational protection	Relational
35	Krisdayanti	Yuni Shara	Family	Moral intervention	Moral/ relational

Table 2 presents the 35 communicative episodes included in the corpus. The *crisis actor* identifies the politician or celebrity to whom the third-party intervention is directed or whose position is addressed; *third-party communicator* identifies the person or institution publicly intervening in the crisis discourse; *network* indicates the communicator's relational or institutional position; *communicative function* records the primary function assigned through coding; and *frame* identifies the principal interpretive lens of the intervention, such as factual, legal, relational, political, moral, or religious.

3. Results & Discussion

3.1 The Expanding Role of Third-Party Communicators

Across the 35 communicative episodes, crisis communication extended beyond the politician or celebrity directly implicated in the scandal. Third-party interventions came from family members, spouses, political actors, lawyers, religious figures, institutional actors, and members of wider social networks. Their participation was not limited to defending the crisis actor. Third parties also provided information, contextualized allegations, addressed relationships and moral concerns, and sought to manage further discussion. The findings therefore indicate that personal crisis communication involves a broader set of communicative actors than the individual whose reputation is directly threatened.

This finding extends the actor-centered orientation of Image Repair Theory (IRT). IRT primarily conceptualizes image repair as a response to accusations or suspicions of wrongdoing, although Benoit also recognizes situations in which one person defends another. Third-party defense was prominent in the present corpus, particularly among lawyers, political colleagues, family members, and other actors close to the crisis actor. However, third-party participation was not consistently aligned with the interests of the person at the center of the scandal.

This broader pattern is consistent with RAT, which conceptualizes crisis communication as a multivocal process involving multiple actors who contribute to the construction and negotiation of crisis meanings [12, 13]. Research on third-party participation similarly shows that crisis communication can extend beyond the primary crisis actor. Millner, Veil, and Sellnow [7], for example, found that third-party organizations could act as proxy communicators when the primary crisis actor failed to respond effectively. Although their study concerned organizational crisis communication, it provides a useful precedent for understanding crisis response as distributed across multiple communicative actors.

Research on political sex scandals provides a closer parallel. Stewart et al. [16] found that participants considered third-party statements when evaluating politicians involved in political sex scandals, suggesting that outside communicators can become relevant sources of information in scandal discourse. Their findings demonstrate that third-party messages can become consequential elements of political scandal communication. The present study addresses a different question by examining the communicative functions performed by third parties themselves rather than their effects on audience evaluations.

Political wives have likewise been shown to become part of the public construction of political scandals. Mandell [8] demonstrated that wives could acquire symbolic significance through their participation in scandal discourse, even when they did not speak, while Mandell and Martin [9] examined how spouses contributed to narratives of penance, remedy, and resolution. These studies establish that actors surrounding a scandalized public figure can become part of the scandal discourse. The present study extends this perspective by examining identifiable third-party interventions across a wider range of relational and institutional actors.

The corpus also shows that third-party participation did not necessarily produce a unified account of the scandal. Fadhila, for example, disclosed information that confirmed the affair involving Ayus, whereas Haji Komar, also positioned within the

family network, defended Nissa. Similarly, actors in the Ridwan Kamil case provided different accounts concerning the allegations and their factual context. Third parties therefore cannot be understood simply as extensions of the crisis actor's communication. Their participation may support, challenge, or complicate the developing crisis discourse.

This finding provides the basis for examining what third-party communicators actually do within personal scandals. The following sections therefore move from the presence of third parties to the functions they perform, the relationship between those functions and existing crisis-response typologies, and the contextual factors associated with their participation.

3.2. From Defense to Disclosure: Diverse Communicative Functions

Analysis process identified seven functions of third-party communication: defense, contextualization, disclosure, relational protection, moral intervention, religious meaning-making, and boundary setting. Together, these functions show that third-party interventions served purposes that ranged from supporting the crisis actor to providing information, protecting relationships, and addressing moral or religious concerns.

Defense and contextualization

Defense was the most common function in the corpus, often accompanied by contextualization. Third-party communicators rejected allegations, questioned accusers' claims, or provided information that supported the crisis actor's position. Lawyers frequently performed this role. In the Ridwan Kamil case, for example, his lawyer questioned the timeline of Lisa Mariana's pregnancy and later stated that Ridwan Kamil would accept the DNA test result. Similar forms of legal defense appeared in the cases of Cut Tari, Gisel, and Zumi Zola.

This finding is consistent with research on third-party image repair. However, third-party defense does not necessarily duplicate the response of the crisis actor. Nelson [17], for example, showed that peers defending Billie Jean King used bolstering and separated her private life from her public achievements. The study illustrates how supporters can employ different rhetorical strategies while contributing to the same broader defense. Similarly, Wen, Yu, and Benoit [18] found that Taiwanese media participated in a collective effort to repair the image of baseball player Wang Chien-ming. Smith and Connable [11] further demonstrate that religious leaders can perform image-repair work on behalf of political figures through multiple rhetorical strategies.

The present corpus shows a similar pattern across a wider range of relational and institutional positions. Political colleagues, family members, friends, lawyers, and religious actors provided explanations, alternative accounts, or additional context surrounding the allegations. The Gus Dur case is particularly notable because actors from political and religious networks participated in interpreting the allegations. Their interventions did not always simply reject the allegations. Some instead provided circumstances or alternative interpretations through which the allegations could be understood.

Contextualization was therefore closely connected to defense but was not identical to it. Communicators could explain the circumstances of an event, question its timing, provide an alternative account, or situate the allegation within a broader political, personal, or moral context. This distinction is important because an intervention could

support the crisis actor without directly denying the allegation. In such cases, the communicator's contribution lay partly in influencing how the available information was interpreted.

This finding also shows why third-party defense should not be understood as simple repetition of the crisis actor's response. Different communicators may contribute different information, explanations, or perspectives based on their relationship to the case. The result is a form of distributed defense in which support for the crisis actor can be constructed through multiple, complementary interventions.

Disclosure and Counter-Narrative

Disclosure was another important function of third-party communication. Rather than defending the crisis actor, some communicators introduced or confirmed information that supported, complicated, or challenged the dominant crisis narrative. Disclosure sometimes developed into a counter-narrative when the information provided by one communicator conflicted with accounts presented by others.

The Ayus–Nissa Sabyan case provides a clear example. Fadhila, Ayus's sister, publicly confirmed the affair, thereby supporting the allegation rather than protecting Ayus's position. In the Ridwan Kamil case, Ayu Aulia provided information concerning Lisa Mariana's pregnancy timeline that contributed to an alternative interpretation of the allegation, while Ridwan Kamil's lawyer presented a defensive account. These cases show that third-party communication can introduce competing accounts of the same event.

This pattern is consistent with research showing that third parties can become important sources of crisis information. Third-party actors could fill information gaps when the primary crisis actor responded poorly or remained silent [7]. Research on self and third party disclosure likewise suggests that the source of crisis information can influence how audiences evaluate a crisis actor [19]. Although these studies differ in context and focus, they support the relevance of third-party information provision to crisis communication.

The contrast between Fadhila and Haji Komar further illustrates the independence of disclosure from network position. Both were connected to the same family network, yet their interventions supported different sides of the dispute. Disclosure in the present corpus therefore did not simply supplement the crisis actor's response. It could introduce information that reinforced, challenged, or complicated existing accounts, contributing to a more contested crisis discourse.

Moral and Emotional Intervention

A further function involved moral and emotional intervention. These responses addressed wrongdoing, responsibility, relationships, forgiveness, and how the crisis actor should respond to or move beyond the transgression. Unlike defense and contextualization, which primarily addressed the allegation and its interpretation, these interventions focused on the moral and relational implications of the alleged wrongdoing.

This function is particularly relevant to infidelity scandals because such controversies involve more than competing factual claims. Political sex scandals can generate broader moral discourse about social values and norms, while public responses may also construct pathways toward penance, remedy, and resolution [9] Third-party

communication may therefore address not only whether an alleged event occurred, but also what the wrongdoing means for responsibility, relationships, and moral conduct.

Raffi Ahmad's statement concerning Syahnaz illustrates this function. Rather than defending or attacking either party, he emphasized that people can make mistakes and that what matters is becoming a better person afterward. His intervention shifted attention from the details of the affair toward moral improvement and the possibility of moving forward. Rather than establishing the factual status of the allegation, the statement addressed how the wrongdoing should be understood and what should follow from it.

This emphasis on moral improvement is consistent with research linking crisis communication to responsibility, apology, and reconciliation. Frandsen and Johansen's analysis of an individual's public apology, for example, shows how apologetic communication can involve ethical questions concerning responsibility and the restoration of damaged relationships. Research on forgiveness similarly suggests that moral-harm crises can intensify negative emotions and make forgiveness more difficult because they involve perceived violations of ethical norms and trust [20, 21]. In the present study, however, forgiveness is not treated as an audience outcome. Rather, it is part of the moral and relational vocabulary through which third parties address wrongdoing, relationships, and the possibility of reconciliation.

The relational dimension is also relevant to interpersonal transgression. Stackhouse, Jones Ross, and Boon [22] show that responses to unresolved interpersonal offenses can involve emotional, cognitive, and evaluative processes concerning both the offense and the offender. This is relevant to infidelity scandals because the alleged wrongdoing concerns an intimate relationship while simultaneously becoming a public moral controversy. Third-party interventions can therefore contribute to how the offender, the relationship, and the possibility of reconciliation are interpreted.

Emotional expression formed another element of this intervention. Previous crisis communication research suggests that emotional framing can shape perceptions of responsibility and sincerity [23]. The present study does not examine these audience effects. Instead, emotional language is considered as part of what third parties communicated when addressing the moral and relational consequences of alleged wrongdoing.

Moral and emotional intervention therefore represents a shift from managing the allegation to addressing its implications for relationships, responsibility, and moral conduct. Third parties could frame the crisis as an occasion for acknowledging mistakes, encouraging improvement, invoking forgiveness, or considering the possibility of moving forward.

3.3. Beyond Existing Crisis Response Typologies

IRT provide useful frameworks for interpreting responses concerning responsibility, blame, and reputation [3, 4]. The findings, however, show that third-party interventions do not always map neatly onto these established response categories. Some functions

overlap with existing strategies, while others pursue communicative purposes that extend beyond image repair or responsibility management.

Table 3. Observed Communicative Functions in Relation to IRT Strategies

Observed function	Possible IRT overlap	Basis of overlap or distinction
Defense	Denial, attack the accuser, bolstering	Rejects, challenges, or supports the crisis actor
Contextualization	Justification, reducing offensiveness	Adds circumstances that alter how the allegation is interpreted
Disclosure	Mortification in some cases	May involve acknowledgment of wrongdoing, but does not necessarily express responsibility or remorse
Relational protection	Partial overlap with bolstering	Primarily concerned with maintaining interpersonal ties rather than public reputation
Moral intervention	Mortification, corrective action, bolstering	May address responsibility, repentance, improvement, or forgiveness
Religious meaning-making	Transcendence, bolstering	May interpret the crisis through higher-order religious values or beliefs
Boundary setting	—	Limits involvement, discussion, or escalation rather than repairing image

Defense provides the clearest overlap with existing typologies. Third-party rejection of allegations, challenges to accusers, and reputational support can correspond to IRT strategies such as denial, attack the accuser, and bolstering [3, 4]. Contextualization may likewise overlap with justification or reducing offensiveness when communicators provide circumstances that alter how an allegation is interpreted. These interventions, however, may combine several rhetorical moves within a single response. A third party may provide factual context, challenge a particular inference, and support the crisis actor without explicitly denying the broader allegation.

Other functions extend beyond the primary image-repair orientation of these typologies, although some partially overlap with established strategies. Disclosure, for example, introduces or confirms information relevant to the scandal and may strengthen rather than weaken an allegation. It can overlap with mortification when the disclosed information constitutes an acknowledgment of wrongdoing. Disclosure is nevertheless broader because the act of providing information does not necessarily involve acceptance of responsibility or a request for forgiveness. Relational protection similarly centers on interpersonal ties, while boundary setting concerns the management of involvement, discussion, or escalation. Their primary purposes therefore differ from restoring the crisis actor's public reputation.

Moral and religious interventions further illustrate this distinction. Moral intervention addressed responsibility, personal improvement, forgiveness, and the possibility of moving forward. Religious meaning-making interpreted the crisis through religious values, beliefs, or authority. Both may intersect with IRT strategies such as mortification, corrective action, bolstering, or transcendence. The overlap is nevertheless partial because these interventions may be directed toward moral interpretation or relational and spiritual meaning rather than toward repairing the crisis actor's public image.

The difficulty of fitting these practices into fixed categories is consistent with scholarship questioning the universal applicability of established crisis response frameworks. Lehmborg and Hicks [24], for example, argue for a *glocalization* approach that recognizes the need to adapt crisis communication frameworks to local cultural contexts rather than treating them as universal templates. Barkley [25] similarly found that SCCT was only partially applicable in Japan, where responsibility judgments could extend beyond individual causality. Such findings suggest that established categories may not exhaust the communicative practices through which crises are managed across different cultural and contextual settings.

The findings do not suggest that established image-repair strategies are inadequate.. Their categories remain useful for identifying recognizable forms of reputation and responsibility management. Their limits become more apparent, however, when the communicator is not the person whose reputation is directly threatened. A spouse, family member, political ally, lawyer, or religious actor may have communicative purposes that differ from those of the crisis actor, including maintaining a relationship, providing information, setting boundaries, or interpreting the situation morally or religiously.

A functional approach therefore complements rather than replaces existing crisis response typologies. It makes visible forms of third-party participation that may overlap with established strategies while also serving purposes that those strategies do not fully capture. In personal scandals, crisis communication may consequently involve reputation management alongside information disclosure, relationship maintenance, moral intervention, religious interpretation, and boundary setting.

3.4. Relational Position and Third-Party Communication

Third-party communicators occupied different relational and institutional positions, including family, spousal, political, religious, professional, and social positions. These positions provided different forms of relational proximity, institutional standing, expertise, and access to information. However, position did not determine communicative function. Actors occupying similar positions could perform different functions, while actors in different positions could contribute similar forms of intervention.

This relationship between position and participation is also evident in research on multi-actor crisis communication. Du and Hou [26] conceptualize crisis communication as a process in which actors with different positions and interests participate in meaning negotiation rather than simply transmit a single coordinated message. Terseglav, Lamut, and Kropivnik [27] similarly show that communicative authority may be distributed across actors with different forms of formal authority,

expertise, and public credibility. These perspectives help explain why third-party participation depends partly on the resources and legitimacy available to a communicator, without implying that such resources determine what the communicator will say.

Political networks illustrate this distinction. Political affiliation can provide a basis for continued support during scandal. Cortina and Rottinghaus [28], for example, found that co-partisans remained more supportive of a scandalized political leader even when informed of illegal activity. Although their study concerns political support rather than third-party communication, it demonstrates that partisan ties can remain consequential under conditions of scandal. In the present corpus, political actors similarly participated in the crisis discourse by providing support or alternative interpretations, but their political affiliation did not prescribe a particular communicative function.

Other positions provided different bases for intervention. Spouses and family members had close relational ties to the crisis actor, lawyers brought professional and legal expertise, religious actors could draw on moral or religious authority, and members of wider social networks could contribute information based on their proximity to the people involved. In the corpus, these resources shaped the kinds of information or authority available to communicators, but they did not produce fixed patterns of response.

The contrast between Fadhila and Haji Komar illustrates this point particularly clearly. Both belonged to the family network surrounding the Ayus–Nissa Sabyan case, yet Fadhila disclosed information that supported the allegation, whereas Haji Komar defended Nissa. Their contrasting interventions demonstrate that relational proximity does not necessarily produce communicative alignment. A shared network position may provide similar access to the crisis, while the communicative function of an intervention depends on the actor's relationship to the issue and the purpose of the intervention.

Network position is therefore better understood as a contextual condition that enables particular forms of participation rather than as a determinant of communicative function. This distinction complements the multivocal perspective of Rhetorical Arena Theory, which emphasizes that crisis discourse develops through the participation of actors occupying different positions in the crisis arena [12, 13]. The relevant question is consequently not only who is connected to the crisis actor, but also what communicative work that actor performs within the unfolding crisis discourse.

3.5. Reframing the Crisis

Third-party communication did more than introduce additional voices into the crisis. In several cases, it shifted the interpretive focus through which the scandal was understood. Rather than addressing the alleged affair solely as a question of whether the misconduct occurred, communicators directed attention toward evidence, relationships, morality, religion, or personal improvement. Reframing here refers to a shift in the interpretive focus of the crisis rather than a separate communicative function.

Research on crisis framing similarly shows that the meaning of a crisis can vary according to the frames through which it is communicated. Wu and Choy [29], for example, found that different crisis communication strategies were associated with

different frames in their analysis of a celebrity scandal in China. Zhao [30] likewise showed that crisis interpretation can develop through the interaction of multiple communicators using different frames. These studies support the view that a crisis does not necessarily acquire a single, fixed meaning through the initial allegation or the response of the central actor.

The corpus illustrates several forms of such reframing. Lawyers and other professional communicators shifted attention toward evidence, timelines, DNA testing, and legal procedures, presenting the scandal partly as a question of factual or procedural verification. Spouses and family members sometimes foregrounded relational considerations such as marriage, affection, forgiveness, or the continuation of the relationship. Moral interventions redirected attention toward responsibility, human fallibility, and personal improvement. Religious actors, particularly in the Gus Dur case, introduced religious concepts such as *tabayyun*, placing the allegations within a framework of religious principles concerning how claims should be assessed.

Read and Lock's [31] categorical reframing approach provides a useful conceptual extension for understanding this process. Their study shows how crisis communicators can invoke particular social categories and the meanings associated with them to alter how contested actions are interpreted. Although the present study does not examine categorical identity claims in the same way, their approach highlights an important feature of reframing: crisis communication can change the interpretive category through which an event is understood rather than simply accept or reject an allegation.

The present findings extend this insight by showing that third-party reframing can involve several forms of interpretive emphasis. Communicators introduced legal, relational, moral, political, and religious frames depending on the aspects of the crisis they brought to the foreground. These frames may overlap with the functions identified earlier but remain analytically distinct from them. A single intervention, for example, may perform defense while simultaneously reframing the crisis as a question of evidence, or perform relational protection while shifting attention toward marriage and forgiveness.

Reframing did not necessarily produce a more favorable interpretation of the crisis actor. Ayu Aulia's account, for example, challenged the interpretation that Lisa Mariana's pregnancy resulted from her alleged relationship with Ridwan Kamil, while Fadhila's disclosure supported the allegation involving Ayus. Third-party interventions could therefore reinforce, complicate, or challenge an existing crisis narrative. Their significance lies not simply in whether they supported the crisis actor, but in which aspects of the situation they made more salient.

Reframing therefore represents an interpretive dimension of third-party communication that is not fully captured by strategy-based typologies. The significance of an alleged affair could shift toward questions of evidence, relationships, morality, religion, or personal change depending on the communicative intervention. Third parties thus contributed not only to how the crisis was responded to, but also to how the crisis itself was defined and understood.

4. Conclusion

This study examined how third-party communicators participate in crisis communication surrounding infidelity scandals involving Indonesian politicians and celebrities. The findings show that personal crisis communication extends beyond the statements of the individual at the center of the scandal. Third parties entered the crisis discourse from different relational, institutional, and professional positions and performed functions that could support, complicate, or challenge the central crisis narrative. This finding is consistent with earlier scholarship that identifies third parties as functional participants in scandal and crisis discourse rather than merely peripheral observers [6].

The central contribution of the study is to show that third-party communication cannot be reduced to proxy defense or image repair. While some interventions correspond to established IRT and SCCT strategies concerning denial, blame, responsibility, and reputation [3, 4, 32], others extend beyond these categories. The findings therefore support a function-based approach that treats established crisis response typologies as useful interpretive resources rather than exhaustive accounts of personal crisis communication. This position is consistent with scholarship emphasizing the contextual and socially constructed nature of crisis communication [33].

The analysis also shows that third-party participation can shape how a scandal is interpreted. Interventions may bring particular aspects of a crisis to the foreground, such as evidence, relationships, moral responsibility, religious values, or personal change. These interventions do not necessarily favor the crisis actor. They may reinforce, complicate, or challenge an existing account of the scandal. Reframing is therefore not simply an additional response strategy but a process through which different actors contribute to the public interpretation of a crisis.

Taken together, these findings suggest that personal crisis communication is better understood as a distributed process involving actors with different relationships, resources, and communicative purposes. This complements recent research that conceptualizes crisis communication as an ongoing process of meaning co-construction among multiple actors rather than one-way information delivery [26]. In personal scandals, this process is shaped not only by institutional and stakeholder relationships but also by intimate ties, moral expectations, religious meanings, and interpersonal obligations. Third-party communicators are therefore not merely extensions of the crisis actor. Their participation can expand the range of information, interpretations, and meanings through which a personal crisis becomes publicly understood.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the corpus was constructed from purposively selected online news reports and therefore captures publicly reported third-party interventions rather than the full range of communication occurring across private or less visible channels. Future research could combine news reports with social-media posts, interviews, video statements, and other primary materials to examine how third-party interventions develop across communicative arenas.

Second, the study brings together political and celebrity scandals without systematically comparing the two groups. Differences in network participation observed across the corpus should therefore not be interpreted as categorical distinctions. Comparative research could examine whether communicator positions,

communicative functions, and reframing practices systematically vary across types of public figures.

Third, the analysis identifies communicative functions and frames but does not trace how third-party interventions interact over the course of a crisis. Future studies could adopt longitudinal or process-oriented designs to examine how competing or complementary interventions emerge, respond to one another, and reshape crisis discourse over time. Such research could further develop the multi-actor and meaning-co-construction perspective in contemporary crisis communication research [26].

Future research could also extend the analysis across cultural and institutional contexts. The Indonesian setting provides an important context in which family relationships, political affiliation, religious authority, and interpersonal obligations may intersect in personal scandals. Cross-cultural research could examine whether functions such as religious meaning-making, relational protection, and boundary setting appear in other contexts and how local understandings of morality, family, and public reputation shape third-party participation.

Overall, this study shifts attention from what the crisis actor says to what happens when other actors enter the crisis discourse. Third-party communicators are not merely extensions of the central crisis actor; they may defend, disclose, protect relationships, establish boundaries, intervene morally or religiously, and reframe the meaning of the crisis. Personal crisis communication is therefore better understood as a distributed process in which the public meaning of a scandal develops through the interaction of multiple communicative actors.

Acknowledgments. The authors would like to thank everyone who contributed to this study, particularly Ronal Ridhoi and Afgian Gala who generously shared their time, perspectives, and insights throughout the research process. We are also grateful to our colleagues and academic peers for their constructive feedback and thoughtful discussions, which helped strengthen the analysis and interpretation presented in this article.

Disclosure of Interests. The authors declare that they have no known competing financial or non-financial interests that could have influenced the research, analysis, or interpretation presented in this article.

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