

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY OF TEGAL CITY PUBLIC RELATIONS

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### Abstract

*The arrest of Tegal Mayor Siti Masitha Soeparno by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) accompanied by negative media coverage undeniably caused a crisis that was able to reduce public trust in the Tegal City Government. This study intends to find out the crisis management and public relations strategy of the Tegal City Government regarding the KPK's Red-Handed Arresting Operation (OTT) against Mayor of Tegal. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. The results of this study indicate that the Government of Tegal City tends to ignore the symptoms or signs of the crisis starting to appear and not immediately respond and make decisions quickly and effectively to reduce the risk of a crisis. Public Relations of the Tegal City Government only conducts public relations routines when a crisis occurs, they do not have good training in handling the crisis so that it is not competent in dealing with crises. Public Relations of the Tegal City Government tends to be indifferent to the crisis experienced by the institution and only focus on routine public relations work such as reporting on government activities or agendas. The Tegal City Government has responded to the crisis and tried to restore public trust and improve the governance system as evidenced by various bureaucratic reforms and improvements in the field of public services. The crisis communication strategy used by the Tegal City Government, that is: corrective action strategy with efforts to improve and preventive efforts, justification strategies shown by the City of Tegal by localizing the crisis, and ingratiation strategies carried out by the Tegal City Government by implementing the National Development Dialogue "Towards Tegal Trustworthy and Blessed "which succeeded in formulating city branding.*

**Keywords:** *crisis, management, communication strategy, public relations, government*

### INTRODUCTION

The arrest of Tegal Mayor Siti Masitha Soeparno by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) due to Red-Handed Arresting Operations (OTT) on last August 29, 2017 made Tegal City in the spotlight. In the past few years the mayor has always been caught in corruption cases. In fact, Tegal City, which has the nickname as the Maritime City, seems to have a labeled as a corrupt city.

This seemed to be agreed upon based on the corruption record of Mayor Tegal from time to time (Syailendra Persada, 2017).

Corruption is a social phenomenon that until now has not been eradicated to the fullest. The KPK as an independent institution that specifically handles acts of corruption is an effort to prevent and prosecute corruption. Corruption is seen as an extraordinary crime that requires extraordinary efforts to eradicate it.

Corruption is an illegal act of misusing the trust authorized to them to get unilateral benefits.

Cases of corruption involving regional officials seemed to never stop. In the last performance report at the end of 2017, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) recorded 12 corruption cases involving regents, mayors and their representatives. The involvement of regents and mayors in corruption acts consist of various types and cases, such as acceptance of gratuities and bribery. The entanglement of the Mayor of Tegal is increasing the length of the names of regional heads who are caught in corruption.

The incident of the arrest of Tegal Mayor Siti Masitha Soeparno by the KPK accompanied by negative news from the mass media is undeniably causing a crisis that was able to reduce public trust in the Tegal City Government. Seeing this condition, crisis management is very important for the Tegal City Government through its Public Relations. The condition of the crisis is a turning point that can bring problems to a better or even worse direction. Because the true success or failure of an organization depends on the views, attitudes, and actions which taken by the organization during the crisis.

The impact of the Red-Handed Arresting Operations (OTT) conducted by the KPK on the non-active Mayor of Tegal Siti Masitha Soeparno among others caused a stir in the governance of the Tegal City Government system, this was evidenced by 15 ASNs (State Civil Apparatus) which were unilaterally interfered by Siti Masitha Soeparno demanded that her rights be returned. In addition, the community has become apathetic towards the performance of the Tegal City Government, especially Tegal City has become a negative spotlight by various national mass media.

Kriyantono in his book entitled "Public Relations, Issues & Crisis Management" explains that there are three possible crisis impacts for the organization, that is: (a) the organization closes, is acquired by another organization or declared bankrupt; (b) the organization still exists but experiences financial losses, loses public trust, and loses market share, thus requiring time to return; and (c) organizations can maintain a reputation and can even be better than before the crisis (Kriyantono, 2015: 195).

The role of PR is very important in conveying all kinds of information related to what happens in the city. This is in accordance with Contitution Number 14 year of 2008 concerning Public

Information Openness (KIP). Public organisations in this case are state institutions, non-government public institutions, and public companies that receive allocation funds from the APBN, APBD, foreign aid, and community associations have an obligation to provide access to open and efficient information to the public in the framework for transparency, accountability and better management of the government in Indonesia. Without exception, the Tegal City Government Public Relations which should have provided transparent access to information to the public and at the same time formed a crisis team within the Tegal City Government Public Relations to anticipate the occurrence of mis-information or hoaxes.

A crisis is something that every organization cannot avoid. Various facts have shown how much and as good as an organization can still not be separated from the threat of a crisis that can come at any time. In the book "Crisis Management Planning & Execution" (Devlin in Kriyantono, 2015: 196) defines a crisis as "an unstable time for organization, with a distinct possibility for an undesirable outcome", which can be interpreted as an unstable situation with various possibility of producing unwanted effects. From this definition it can be said that if the

organization is having a crisis situation, then normal procedures cannot work that cause instability.

Public Relations is the spearhead of information and communication management. All forms of handling, preventing and managing crisis organizations are an important part of the functions that must be carried out by PR. In addition, public relations is also a liaison between the organization and stakeholders directly related to the image and reputation of the organization must have the ability to develop strategies and manage crisis communications both before, during, and after the crisis.

Errors in managing crisis communications can pose a risk that has a negative impact, including: increasing the intensity of problems, public spotlight, disproportionate mass media coverage, deterioration of reputation, and credibility so that public trust in Tegal City decreases. Therefore an effective crisis communication strategy is very much needed in connection with crisis communication in an organization including the Tegal City Government in overcoming the crisis at hand.

The research conducted by the author is more in-depth about crisis management carried out by Public Relations of an organization in handling

the case of Red-Handed Arresting Operations (OTT) by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) against Mayor Tegal. The distinguishing and interesting thing about this research is that it is so complicated that the crisis faced by the Tegal City Government and the lack of literature on crisis management in the Regional Government that the authors found makes the authors interested in conducting research on crisis strategy and management by the Tegal City Government Public Relations and efforts to restore public trust in Tegal City.

Based on the description above, the research problem can be formulated, that is: How is the crisis management and strategy of the Tegal City Government Public Relations related to the Corruption Eradication Commission's (OTT) Red-Handed Arresting Operation (Mayor) against Mayor Tegal?

The purpose of this study was to find out the crisis management and strategy of Public Relations of the Tegal City Government regarding the Corruption Eradication Commission's (KPK) Red-Handed Arresting Operation (OTT) against Tegal Mayor, Siti Masitha Soeparno.

Attribution theory explains that stakeholders tend to make attribution about the cause of the crisis, who must be

responsible for the crisis situation, whether the organization is involved and the situation around the crisis (Coombs, 2010 in Kriyantono, 2014: 170). In the Attribution Theory, the crisis was identified as the cause for the response to the crisis. The crisis response can reduce or eliminate the negative effects of the crisis. The crisis management team manages various aspects of the crisis in collaboration with the legal and financial section (Prayudi, 2016: 202).

Communication strategy is a blend of communication planning with communication management to achieve the stated goals. This communication strategy must be able to show how its operations should be practically carried out, in the sense that approaches can vary at any time depending on the situation and conditions (Effendy, 2003: 32). Communication strategies that are part of the PR strategy are important things that must be owned by PR to help their performance within an organization or institution.

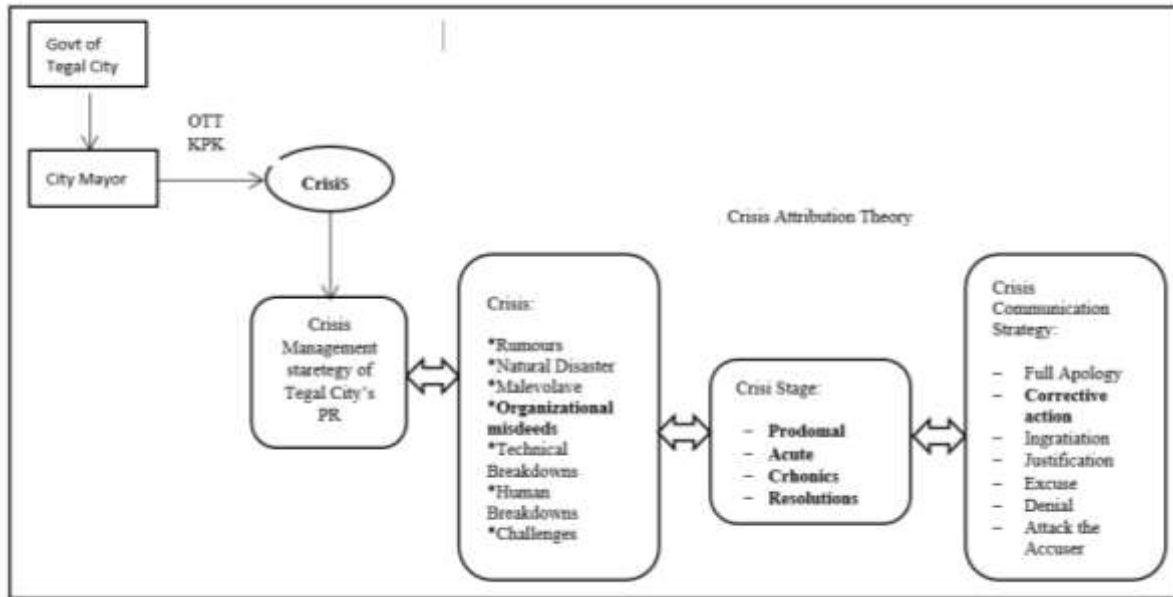
Errors in managing crisis communications can pose a risk that has a negative impact, including increasing the intensity of problems, public spotlight, disproportionate mass media coverage, decreasing reputation and credibility so that public trust is reduced. For this reason,

an effective crisis communication strategy is needed in relation to crisis communication in an organization in overcoming the crisis it has faced. Coombs (1999: 121) states that "the crisis communication strategies represent the actual responses the organization uses to address the crisis". Communication is not only limited to verbal but real actions from the company are more needed in times of crisis. This is reinforced by Allen & Caollouet (as in Coombs, 1999) "crisis communication strategies involve the words (verbal aspects) and actions (nonverbal aspects) organizations direct toward the crisis".

Coombs (1999: 125) also states that "the selection of crisis communication strategies are based on the characteristics of the crisis situation". The crisis communication strategy used must be adjusted to the characteristics of the crisis conditions experienced by the organization. Based on his opinion. W. Timothy Coombs (1999: 122-125)

describes a number of strategy options that can be used by organizations: Attack the accuser, Denial, Excuse, Justification, Innovation, Corrective action, Full apology.

The Image Restoration (TIR) theory can be applied in the context of individuals and groups or organizations, that is discussing the response of individuals or organizations when their image is positive and their reputation is threatened. William Benoit, known as the TIR initiator in 1995 has conducted various studies of TIR applications in various contexts: companies, governments, religious leaders, celebrities, political figures, athletes and products (Benoit, 2005; Robert, 2006 in Kriyantono, 2014: 227) . TIR departs from two assumptions (Blaney, Benoit & Brazeal, 20002): communication, that is activities that are used to achieve certain goals (a goal-oriented activity) and the main purpose of communication, that is maintaining a positive image and positive reputation.



**Figure 1. Thinking Framework**  
(Source: primary data)

**METHOD**

The approach taken in this study is qualitative with a case study method. The research subject is Public Relations of the Tegal City Government, while the object of this research is crisis management related to the Tegal Mayor's Red-Handed Arresting Operation (OTT) by the Corruption Eradication Commission on August 29, 2017. Data collection techniques is using interviews, observations, and documents sourced from clipping, magazines, literature, books and internet sites. The data analysis technique is using qualitative data analysis techniques, while the triangulation technique is used to examine the validity of the data in this study.

**DISCUSSION**

**Type of crisis: Organizational Misdeeds**

The starting point for the trigger of the crisis is that the bribery case of Tegal Mayor (Siti Masitha Soeparno) was illegal and immoral until the KPK Red-Handed Arresting Operations incident occurred to Mayor Tegal. Demonstrations from various groups and internal complaints from the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) that were not immediately followed up were characteristic of the indicated crisis of misdeeds.

**Crisis Phase**

The prodromal stage was marked by abuse of authority, did not give Auth to the deputy mayor and deactivated dozens

of ASNs that were deemed inconsistent. The Red-Handed Arresting Operation (OTT) carried out by the KPK against Siti Masitha Soeparno, who at that time served as Mayor of Tegal in the official residence for alleged bribery of infrastructure development projects in Tegal City was an acute stage of the crisis experienced by the Tegal City Government. The chronic phase occurred along with the media coverage and negative opinions about the Tegal City Government continued to roll. Home Minister, Tjahyo Kumolo, gave a decree through the Governor of Central Java to the Deputy Mayor to create a clean bureaucratic reform. In the resolution phase, the Tegal City Government conducted internal guidance and evaluation to all levels of the bureaucracy to improve governance.

### **Crisis Communication Strategy**

The justification strategy was shown by the Tegal City by localizing the crisis. The Tegal City Government assured the public that the bribery case that occurred in the Tegal City Government was a personal case, so it was hoped that the public would not see it as an institutional mistake. In addition, a temporary dismissal was made of Siti Masitha Soeparno as Mayor of Tegal, reactivating the position of disabled officials, forming bureaucratic reforms,

and inaugurating the new Acting Mayor of Tegal. Other justification strategies carried out by the Government of Tegal City are to open access to the public, mass media, and interested parties to obtain information related to the process of law enforcement in the case of Siti Masitha Soeparno's bribery. This strategy is intended to minimize the impact of disturbances that may occur such as the circulation of negative coverage that is not in accordance with the facts.

One important point in the ingratiation strategy carried out by the Tegal City Government was the implementation of the National Development Dialogue "Towards Trustworthy and Baroque Tegal" which succeeded in formulating city branding. This is done to restore the reputation of Tegal City as well as a promotional media for Tegal City as a Maritime City.

Public oversight is recognized as a key factor in the success of development, the alumni of Tegal Middle School 1 and Middle School 2 took the initiative to organize National Dialogue as a form of education and continue to invite all stakeholders to be more concerned about the way the government ensures the success of trustworthy and blessed development.

The Tegal City Government has responded to the crisis and tried to restore public trust and improve the governance system as evidenced by various bureaucratic reforms and improvements in the field of public services. The Tegal City Government has also carried out city branding to improve the reputation of the Tegal City Government.

There seems to be an effort to improve and preventive efforts so that the crisis does not repeat itself which shows a corrective action strategy. The steps taken by the Tegal City Government are reactivating some non-job officials to be returned to their original positions. Preventive efforts by the Tegal City Government are by requiring all state officials in the Tegal City Government to record and report their assets to the KPK. LHKPN reporting is an element supporting clean government. Improvement of the bureaucracy and governance of the Tegal City Government is carried out by preparing an Inspectorate Team to conduct a thorough inspection.

The crisis of the Tegal City Government has been realized since the legal case involving Siti Masitha Soeparno related to bribery cases and several corruption cases were revealed. The abuse of authority of Mayor Tegal happened which was actually already known to Nur

Sholeh, who at that time served as Deputy Mayor. Demonstrations from various groups did not receive serious attention from the Tegal City Government. In addition, complaints from internal ASN regarding the sale and purchase of positions were also not immediately followed up as the beginning of a crisis that could have been prevented.

The Tegal City Government tends to ignore symptoms or signs of a crisis starting to emerge. The Tegal City Government does not immediately respond and make quick and effective decisions to reduce the risk of a crisis. In addition, the Tegal City Government does not have crisis management as a form of preparedness in the face of a crisis.

Through the perspective of crisis management practitioners delivered by Kate Miller (1999), a crisis occurs if the organization fails to monitor issues, including not conducting environment scanning activities. The best step to overcome the crisis is to make a crisis anticipation plan or issue plan. This shows that the Tegal City Government has not been able to implement crisis management theory in public relations activities in the Tegal City Government environment.

According to the findings, during the research, the Tegal City Government did not have crisis management, either



before the crisis or when the crisis occurred related to the KPK's Red-Handed Arresting Operation (OTT) against Tegal Mayor Siti Masitha Soeparno. This is because the Tegal City Government does not consider bribery cases that ensnare Tegal Mayor Siti Masitha Soeparno as a "crisis" but as a personal case involving only a few individuals in the Tegal City Government who do not have a broad impact on the public service system in Tegal City Government . It well said, because according to Acting Mayor Tegal the public service system in the Tegal City Government still continues as usual.

The Tegal City government tends to ignore symptoms or signs of a crisis starting to emerge, not responding immediately and making quick and effective decisions to reduce the risk of a crisis.

Public Relations of the Tegal City Government does not have crisis management, Public Relations only focuses on routine public relations work such as reporting on government activities or agendas, does not have good training in handling the crisis so that it is not competent in dealing with crises. The crisis communication strategy used by the Tegal City Government is in accordance with Coombs Theory as a reference in this study.

## CONCLUSION

Public Relations as the information provider for the people of Tegal City, the Public Relations and Protocol Section of course carry out their main tasks and functions based on the guidelines of The Constitution Number 14 year of 2008 concerning Public Information Openness. Government public relations, such as the Tegal City Government, are providers and parties that carry out public services related to the provision of all forms of information, policies, activities and work programs of the Tegal City Government. The working mechanism in carrying out public relations activities is also influenced by the Public Information Disclosure Act which makes the Public Relations and Protocol Section move to the public.

The crisis of the Tegal City Government has been realized since the legal case involving Siti Masitha Soeparno related to bribery cases and several corruption cases were revealed. Demonstrations from various groups did not receive serious attention from the Tegal City Government. In addition, complaints from internal ASN regarding the sale and purchase of positions were also not immediately followed up as the beginning of a crisis that could have been prevented. The Tegal City Government tends to ignore symptoms or signs of a

crisis starting to emerge. The Tegal City Government does not immediately respond and make quick and effective decisions to reduce the risk of a crisis.

Tegal City Government does not have crisis management as a form of preparedness in facing a crisis. This shows that the Tegal City Government has not been able to implement crisis management theory in public relations activities in the Tegal City Government environment.

The Tegal City Government did not consider the bribery case that ensnared Tegal Mayor Siti Masitha Soeparno as a "crisis" but as a personal case involving only a few individuals in the Tegal City Government who did not have a broad impact on the public service system in Tegal City Government. Several corruption cases that occurred during the previous leadership period made bribery cases that struck Tegal Mayor Siti Masitha Soeparno a thing that was not surprising so that it was no longer considered a "crisis". Although the crisis in the eyes of public relations is not always identified with threats, both are caused by internal and external factors.

Tegal City Government has known indications of the emergence of a crisis but has not reacted more quickly and made effective decisions in the face of crises. Moreover, the Public Relations of Tegal

City Government only conducts public relations routines when a crisis occurs. Public Relations of Tegal City Government does not have good training in handling the crisis so that it is not competent in facing the crisis, Public Relations of Tegal City Government tends to be indifferent to the crisis experienced by its institutions and only focus on public relations routine work such as reporting Government activities or agendas.

The focus of the Tegal City Public Relations work was aided by the Acting Mayor of Tegal in a crisis to deal with the crisis. Nur Sholeh as Acting Mayor of Tegal on various occasions more often appeared in various local and national media to provide information, specifically the efforts and strategies carried out by the Tegal City Government in improving the governance system in Tegal City. Nur Sholeh also instructed that the OPD ranks should be open when asked for information regarding the Siti Mashita Soeparno case.

During the crisis, the Tegal City Government put the media as a partner to be able to help implement the crisis communication strategy used. This can be seen from the use of mass media as a communication channel in reaching a broad public. The Tegal City Government also asks for help from experts and

academics to advise and support the steps taken by the Tegal City Government to be able to direct positive public opinion towards the Tegal City Government during the crisis.

In fact, when researchers conduct interviews for academic purposes, the Head of Public Relations and Protocol of the Tegal City Government is reluctant to give answers and refuses to be interviewed. The statements in the mass media related to the Red-Handed Arresting Operation (OTT) case against Siti Masitha Soeparno were actually given by Nur Sholeh as Acting Mayor of Tegal. This indicates that the Public Relations of Tegal City Government was unable to build credibility with the media, even though they had received instructions from Acting Mayor Tegal to be open to the media.

The crisis communication strategy used by the City of Tegal is in accordance with the theory of Coombs which is used as a reference in this study. The Tegal City Government uses three crisis communication strategies namely justification, ingratiation, and corrective action.

The justification strategy was shown by the City of Tegal by localizing the crisis. The Tegal City Government assured the public that the bribery case that occurred in the Tegal City Government

was a personal case, so it was hoped that the public would not see it as an institutional mistake. In addition, a temporary dismissal was made of Siti Masitha Soeparno as Mayor of Tegal, reactivating the position of disabled officials, forming bureaucratic reforms, and inaugurating the new Acting Mayor of Tegal. Other justification strategies carried out by the Government of Tegal City are to open access to the public, mass media, and interested parties to obtain information related to the process of law enforcement in the case of Siti Masitha Soeparno's bribery. This strategy is intended to minimize the impact of disturbances that may occur such as the circulation of negative coverage that is not in accordance with the facts.

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Public oversight is recognized as a key factor in the success of development, the alumni of Tegal Middle School 1 and Middle School 2 took the initiative to

organize National Dialogue as a form of education and continue to invite all stakeholders to be more concerned about the way the government ensures the success of trustworthy and blessed development.

The Tegal City Government has responded to the crisis and tried to restore public trust and improve the governance system as evidenced by various bureaucratic reforms and improvements in the field of public services. The Tegal City Government has also carried out city branding to improve the reputation of the Tegal City Government.

There seems to be an effort to improve and preventive efforts so that the crisis does not repeat itself which shows a corrective action strategy. The steps taken by the Tegal City Government are reactivating some non-job officials to be returned to their original positions. Preventive efforts by the Tegal City Government are by requiring all state officials in the Tegal City Government to record and report their assets to the KPK. LHKPN reporting is an element supporting

clean government. Improvement of the bureaucracy and governance of the Tegal City Government is carried out by preparing an Inspectorate Team to conduct a thorough inspection.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the Tegal City Government does not have crisis management formally and specifically but has carried out various crisis communication strategies to deal with the crisis of the KPK Capture Operations case against Siti Masitha Soeparno. Tegal City Public Relations and Protocol uses its functions and roles but is limited to routine public relations activities but does not carry out its main role in crisis management. Tegal City Government seeks to provide effective and motivated public services, namely by launching the "Tegal Melayani" program as an effort to realize the vision and mission of Tegal City which is prosperous based on excellent service. Besides that, ASN administration service "One Door" was formed to facilitate ASN in managing personnel data.

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