

Dominance of Corrective Action in Local Government Crisis Communication: A Quantitative Content Analysis of Surabaya City Government Press Releases Based on Image Repair Theory

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Abstract

This study examines the distribution of crisis communication strategies in official press releases issued by the Surabaya City Government between August and November 2024 using the framework of Image Repair Theory. A quantitative approach with content analysis was employed to analyze 50 press releases selected through purposive sampling. The unit of analysis was each press release document in its entirety, categorized based on the most dominant crisis communication strategy. Inter-coder reliability measured using Cohen's Kappa indicated a high level of agreement ($\kappa = 0.82$). The findings reveal that Corrective Action is the most dominant strategy (56%), followed by Reducing Offensiveness (30%), Evading Responsibility (12%), and Mortification (2%), while Denial was not identified in the sample. These results suggest that local government crisis communication is primarily action-oriented and focused on issue management rather than rhetorical confrontation or outright rejection. The study contributes to public sector crisis communication research by demonstrating that institutional legitimacy in local governance contexts is largely constructed through administrative action rather than defensive strategies.

Keywords: Crisis Communication; Image Repair Theory; Press Releases; Public Relations Media; Quantitative Content Analysis

1. Introduction

Surabaya, as the second-largest metropolitan city in Indonesia, faces complex social, economic, and political dynamics. These conditions give rise to various urban issues, such as flooding, waste management, transportation, public health, and public policy, that may escalate into crises if not properly managed. In this context, crisis communication

becomes a crucial instrument for local governments to maintain informational stability and public trust.

Research about crisis management implemented through public relations strategies can help maintain institutional reputation even under strong public pressure (Andryani & Nurdiarti, 2018). Crisis communication itself refers to the strategic exchange of information between organizations and the public during events that threaten organizational continuity, reputation, or legitimacy (Fearn-Banks, 2016), (Coombs, 2007). Within this framework, Image Repair Theory, proposed by Benoit (1995), explains that organizations facing reputational threats may employ several response strategies, including denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. In the context of public institutions, these strategies function not only as communication responses but also as mechanisms for maintaining accountability and institutional legitimacy.

Crisis communication research in Indonesia has been conducted across various sectors. Studies in the private sector show how communication strategies are used to restore corporate reputation following public controversies or crises, such as the “Reimagining Blue Bird” campaign after transportation protests (Suryani & Sagiyanto, 2018). crisis communication following the Lombok earthquake affecting Transmart Mataram (Mauliah et al, 2019). and tourism crisis management after the Sunda Strait tsunami in Tanjung Lesung (Oktarini & Atmadi, 2020). Other research highlights how coordinated communication efforts and media engagement helped restore institutional reputation in cases such as the Novita Hotel controversy in Jambi (Khairunnisa, 2022). Similar findings are reported in studies of corporate crisis communication, including Grab Indonesia’s response to the GrabWheels accident (Zebua et al., 2021). PT Astra Honda Motor’s handling of the eSAF frame controversy (Reynaldin & Saputra, 2024). and PT Indah Kiat Pulp & Paper’s response to environmental issues (Safitri & Kemala, 2019).

In the public sector, crisis communication research has examined several governmental institutions. Studies have analyzed the Directorate General of Taxes’ communication strategies during controversies surrounding Value Added Tax policies (Juliana et al., 2022). and the Ministry of Health’s communication response to resistance against measles-rubella immunization using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory framework (Yulianti & Boer, 2020). Other research highlights the role of public relations in managing reputational issues within government agencies such as the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (Cea et al., 2020), (Marlianto et al., 2023), the National Civil Service Agency in

addressing recruitment fraud (Najib, 2023), and the Indonesian House of Representatives in responding to public protests against the Job Creation Bill through social media (Iskandar et al., 2021). In addition, conceptual discussions have expanded crisis communication contexts to financial sector risks such as online gambling (Pramono, 2024) and disaster communication through local cultural media (Andung et al., 2024). Despite this diversity of contexts, most studies rely on qualitative approaches such as case studies or descriptive analysis.

From the review of crisis communication studies, several dominant patterns emerge. First, the majority of research employs qualitative approaches such as case studies, in-depth interviews, or descriptive analyses. Second, although some studies draw upon Image Repair Theory and SCCT, their application tends to be interpretative and narrative rather than operational and quantitative. Third, research commonly focuses on private corporations, ministries, state-owned enterprises, or national-level institutions, while studies on local government crisis communication remain relatively limited. Fourth, there is still limited research that systematically categorizes and measures the distribution of crisis communication strategies in official local government press releases using theory-based quantitative content analysis.

This study contributes to the development of crisis communication research by addressing a methodological gap in the Indonesian context. While previous studies have primarily examined crisis communication through qualitative case studies or descriptive analyses across corporate and governmental institutions, limited research has systematically measured the distribution of crisis communication strategies using quantitative content analysis. By operationalizing the categories of Image Repair Theory into a structured coding framework and applying them to official local government press releases, this study provides a quantitative mapping of crisis communication strategies within municipal governance. The findings, therefore, offer a methodological contribution by demonstrating how theory-based content analysis can be used to identify dominant crisis communication patterns in government communication practices.

This methodological gap indicates that crisis communication research in Indonesia continues to be dominated by interpretative approaches and has not extensively developed quantitative measurements of message structures. Specifically, no study has systematically operationalized the categories of Image Repair Theory into a quantitative coding instrument to analyze municipal government press releases.

To address this gap, the present study applies quantitative content analysis to examine the press releases of the Surabaya City Government published on Surabaya.go.id. Drawing on Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1995) This study categorizes crisis response messages into five primary strategies and analyzes their frequency distribution systematically. Unlike previous studies that emphasize crisis management processes or narrative interpretations of strategy, this research focuses on measurable message patterns.



Figure 1. Hexagon Image Repair theory (Benoit, 1995)

Methodologically, quantitative content analysis has proven effective in identifying message patterns in media content. In quantitative content analysis to classify persuasive messages and interaction types within cyberprotest discourse on Twitter (Aisyah, 2020). Similarly, the frequency of religious messages in YouTube sermons was analyzed using quantitative content analysis (Arrosyid & Halwati, 2022). Other research also employed this method to examine how online media construct news narratives regarding student activities (Saptiyono et al., 2020). These studies demonstrate that quantitative content analysis is widely applicable in communication research, yet remains underutilized in crisis communication contexts.

The Surabaya City Government regularly publishes press releases through its official portal, Surabaya.go.id, covering policies, programs, and responses to public issues. This platform serves not only as an official information distribution channel but also as a tool for image-building and institutional legitimacy. Consequently, Surabaya.go.id represents a relevant and appropriate object for analyzing crisis communication at the local government level.

The data collection period spans August to November 2024, representing the final phase of the mayoral administration. Political communication literature suggests that, within electoral cycles and competitive digital media environments, public actors and institutions tend to intensify communication activities to maintain legitimacy and strategically frame performance achievements (Lilleker, 2016); (Stromback & Kioussis, 2019). In such contexts, institutional visibility and public sensitivity toward policy issues typically increase, making this period a relevant setting for analyzing the construction of crisis communication in official local government messaging.

Based on this background, this study seeks to answer the following research question: What crisis communication strategies are most dominantly employed by the Surabaya City Government in its official press releases, and how are these strategies distributed across different public issue contexts? By focusing on message patterns rather than effectiveness or public response, this study aims to provide empirical and methodological contributions to the development of local government crisis communication research in Indonesia.

2. Method

This study employs a quantitative approach using content analysis as the primary research method. Content analysis was selected because it enables researchers to systematically and objectively identify, categorize, and measure communication message patterns within written documents (Krippendorff, 2013). This approach is applied to examine crisis communication strategies embedded in official press releases issued by the Surabaya City Government. The study is descriptive-quantitative in nature, aiming to map the distribution and dominance of crisis communication strategies based on the frequency of predefined categories.

The object of this research consists of official press releases published by the Surabaya City Government through its official website, Surabaya.go.id. The unit of analysis is each press release document in its entirety. Each press release was coded based on the most dominant crisis communication strategy reflected in the text. The dominant strategy was determined based on the frequency of category indicators and the most emphasized narrative focus within the message.

The population of this study includes all press releases published between August and November 2024. A purposive sampling technique was employed with the following inclusion criteria: (1) the press release addresses public issues, policy controversies, service disruptions, public complaints, or situations potentially perceived as crises; (2) the press

release contains an official response, clarification, or explanation from the government regarding the issue; and (3) the press release was published within the designated research period. Based on these criteria, 50 press releases were selected as the research sample.



Figure 2. Analytical Framework of Local Government Crisis Communication Based on Image Repair Theory

This study applies Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1995) as the framework for categorizing crisis communication strategies. Five primary categories were used: (1) Denial, referring to statements that explicitly reject accusations or assert that no wrongdoing occurred; (2) Evading Responsibility, referring to statements that shift responsibility to external factors, emergency conditions, or institutional limitations; (3) Reducing Offensiveness, referring to efforts to minimize negative impacts, emphasize positive aspects, or compare the situation with worse conditions; (4) Corrective Action, referring to statements outlining concrete steps taken to

resolve the issue or prevent recurrence; and (5) Mortification, referring to explicit acknowledgment of wrongdoing accompanied by an apology.

Each category was operationalized in a coding manual containing specific indicators to minimize interpretative ambiguity. Coding was conducted by two independent coders who received prior training on the categorization guidelines. Before the main coding process, a pilot test was conducted on 20% of the sample (n = 10) to assess the clarity of category definitions, identify potential overlaps among categories, and refine the coding manual.

Table 1. Coder results of the first 10 samples of press releases

No	Press Release Title	Coder 1	Coder 2	Agreement
1	Revitalisasi Pasar Kembang Tahap Pertama Segera Dimulai, PD Pasar Surya Bangun TPS untuk Pedagang	Corrective action	Corrective action	1
2	Miskomunikasi, PD Pasar Surya Tak Larang Kegiatan Kampanye di Pasar	Mortification	Mortification	1
3	Pemkot Surabaya Terjunkan 16 Unit Mobil Damkar Tanggani Kebakaran Sejumlah Rumah di Kawasan Kemayoran Baru	Evading Responsibility	Evading Responsibility	1
4	Dirut Pastikan Pasien Meninggal di IGD RSUD Soewandhie Sudah Ditangani Intensif	Reducing offensiveness	Reducing offensiveness	1
5	Ramai Fenomena Guru Takut Murid di Medsos, Dispendik Surabaya Cari Metode Proses Belajar Mengajar yang Nyaman	Corrective action	Corrective action	1
6	Video Viral Aduan Warga Terkait Layanan Kelurahan, Lurah	Reducing offensiveness	Reducing offensiveness	1

No	Press Release Title	Coder 1	Coder 2	Agreement
	Baratajaya Tegaskan Semua Sudah Terlayani			
7	Urai Kemacetan, Proyek Jalan Menganti Wiyung - Babatan Unesa Surabaya Ditarget Rampung Desember	Corrective action	Corrective action	1
8	Atasi Banjir di Kelurahan Petemon, Pemkot Surabaya Kebut Pembangunan Saluran	Corrective action	Corrective action	1
9	Wujudkan Zero Bullying di Lingkungan Sekolah, Satpol PP Goes To School Sosialisasi Bahaya Kenakalan Remaja	Corrective action	Evading Responsibility	0
10	Menjelang Musim Hujan, Pemkot Surabaya Kebut Proyek Saluran dan Infrastruktur Jalan	Corrective action	Corrective action	1

Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa (κ) to account for agreement beyond chance. A pilot test was conducted on 20% of the sample ($n = 10$). The observed agreement (P_o) was 0.90, while the expected agreement by chance (P_e) was 0.27, resulting in a κ value of 0.86, indicating almost perfect agreement (McHugh, 2016). After minor refinements to the coding guidelines, reliability was recalculated for the full sample ($N = 50$), yielding $\kappa = 0.82$, which also falls within the almost perfect agreement category. These results demonstrate that the coding instrument achieved a high level of consistency and was suitable for quantitative content analysis. Any remaining discrepancies were resolved through coder discussion prior to final analysis.

After minor clarifications were made to the coding guidelines, reliability was recalculated for the full sample ($N = 50$). The κ value of 0.82 also falls within the "almost perfect agreement". These results indicate that the coding instrument demonstrates a very high level of consistency and is appropriate for quantitative content analysis. Any coding discrepancies

were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached prior to final analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using frequency distribution and percentage calculations to identify the prevalence of each crisis communication strategy category. The analysis focuses on the distribution patterns of strategies within the press releases during the research period, without measuring public response or communication effectiveness.

3. Results

Based on the coding results of 50 official press releases issued by the Surabaya City Government during the period of August to November 2024, five crisis communication strategies were identified in accordance with the categories derived from Image Repair Theory. The frequency and percentage distribution of these strategies are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Crisis Communication Strategies in Official Press Releases (N = 50)

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Corrective Action	28	56%
Reducing Offensiveness	15	30%
Evading Responsibility	6	12%
Mortification	1	2%
Denial	0	0%
Total	50	100%

The results demonstrate that Corrective Action is the most frequently used crisis communication strategy, appearing in 28 out of 50 press releases (56%). This is followed by Reducing Offensiveness, which appears in 15 press releases (30%). The strategy of Evading Responsibility is identified in 6 press releases (12%), while Mortification is found in only 1 case (2%). Notably, the Denial strategy was not identified in any of the analyzed documents.

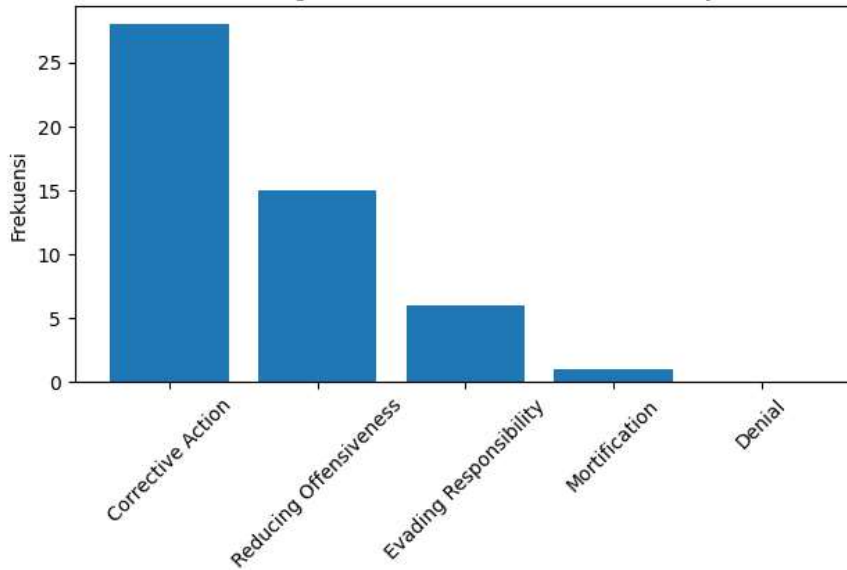


Figure 3. Distribution of Surabaya City Government's Crisis Communication Strategy

The bar chart visualization further illustrates this distribution pattern. The graphical representation clearly shows a substantial gap between Corrective Action and the other categories, highlighting its dominance during the research period. In contrast, the absence of the Denial category is visually evident, as no instances were recorded within the sample.

3.1 The Prevalence of Corrective Action

The findings indicate that more than half of the analyzed press releases primarily employ the Corrective Action strategy. Messages categorized under this strategy emphasize concrete steps undertaken by the local government to address public issues, resolve operational problems, or prevent similar incidents from recurring.

In practical terms, press releases within this category typically contain descriptions of policy adjustments, administrative interventions, coordination with relevant agencies, implementation of technical solutions, or evaluation measures. These communications frequently highlight ongoing improvements, institutional responsiveness, and procedural follow-ups as part of the official response.

The numerical dominance of this category suggests that the government's official messaging during the observed period largely focused on presenting tangible solutions and corrective measures rather than defensive explanations or rhetorical positioning.

3.2 The Use of Reducing Offensiveness

The second most frequent strategy identified in the dataset is Reducing Offensiveness, which accounts for 30% of the press releases. Although significantly lower than Corrective Action, its presence remains substantial within the overall distribution.

Press releases classified under this category tend to minimize the perceived severity of an issue, provide additional contextual clarification, emphasize positive institutional performance, or frame the issue within a broader comparative perspective. In some instances, the government highlights prior achievements or long-term development outcomes to balance the negative implications of a specific incident.

The frequency of this category indicates that, alongside presenting corrective measures, the government also engages in perception management by reframing issues and mitigating potential reputational damage.

3.3 Occurrence of Evading Responsibility

The Evading Responsibility strategy appears in 6 of the 50 press releases (12%). In these cases, the government's messaging refers to external constraints, unforeseen circumstances, technical limitations, or shared responsibility among multiple stakeholders.

While this strategy is present, its frequency remains relatively limited compared to the dominant categories. The data show that references to external factors are used selectively rather than systematically. These instances typically occur in situations involving infrastructural challenges, emergency conditions, or factors beyond direct municipal control.

3.4 Limited Presence of Mortification

Only one press release (2%) was categorized under Mortification. In this instance, the communication included explicit acknowledgment of error accompanied by an apology. The very low frequency of this strategy indicates that explicit apologies are rarely used within the official press releases examined in this study. Compared to other categories, mortification represents the least utilized strategy aside from denial.

3.5 Absence of Denial

Importantly, the analysis did not identify any instance of the Denial strategy within the sample. No press release explicitly rejected accusations or stated that no wrongdoing had occurred. The absence of this category is reflected both numerically and visually in the distribution chart. This finding indicates that outright rejection of allegations was not a prominent feature of the crisis communication practices observed during the study period.

3.6 Overall Pattern of Strategy Distribution

The distribution results indicate a clear pattern of crisis communication strategies employed by the Surabaya City Government. Corrective Action emerges as the most dominant strategy, accounting for 56% of all press releases analyzed, followed by Reducing Offensiveness (30%), Evading Responsibility (12%), and Mortification (2%), while Denial is absent. This distribution demonstrates that crisis communication in the local government context is primarily structured around problem-solving and institutional responsiveness rather than defensive rejection or overt apology. The substantial gap between Corrective Action and other strategies further suggests a strong preference for action-based messaging. These findings directly answer the research question by showing that the Surabaya City Government predominantly employs corrective measures, while other strategies function as complementary or limited responses, indicating that crisis communication is oriented toward administrative action and reputational stabilization.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a clear strategic pattern in the crisis communication practices of the Surabaya City Government. Within the framework of Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1995), organizations confronted with reputational threats may choose among five primary strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. The distribution identified in this study demonstrates a strong concentration on Corrective Action (56%), followed by Reducing Offensiveness (30%), while Evading Responsibility (12%), Mortification (2%), and Denial (0%) appear marginal or absent.

These findings directly address the research question by showing that crisis communication in the Surabaya City Government is predominantly oriented toward corrective and action-based strategies. Rather than rejecting accusations or shifting blame, the communication emphasizes problem resolution and institutional responsiveness. Within Benoit's framework, this pattern reflects a preference for image repair strategies that rely on tangible remedial actions rather than rhetorical defense, indicating that local government crisis communication prioritizes administrative legitimacy and service improvement over defensive or confrontational responses.

4.1 Corrective Action Dominates

The dominance of Corrective Action can be interpreted as a strategic alignment between crisis communication and bureaucratic governance

logic. In Image Repair Theory, corrective action is considered a constructive response because it addresses the root cause of reputational threat by promising or implementing change.

For a local government institution, emphasizing corrective measures serves multiple communicative functions. First, it demonstrates administrative capability and policy responsiveness. Second, it signals accountability without necessarily admitting legal or political fault. Third, it shifts the narrative focus from blame attribution to solution implementation.

These findings are consistent with several previous studies on crisis communication in organizational contexts. For instance, found that Grab Indonesia emphasized corrective actions and service improvements during the GrabWheels accident crisis to maintain public trust (Zebua et al., 2021). Similarly, PT Astra Honda Motor relied heavily on corrective measures such as product evaluation and technical clarification (Reynaldin & Saputra, 2024). These studies indicate that organizations often prioritize corrective actions when addressing reputational threats because this strategy demonstrates responsiveness without directly escalating blame.

However, the findings of this study differ from many previous Indonesian crisis communication studies in terms of methodological approach and institutional context. While earlier research generally relied on qualitative case studies focusing on a single crisis event (Juliana et al., 2022);(Yulianti & Boer, 2020)The present study uses quantitative content analysis to examine a broader pattern of communication strategies across multiple issues. This methodological difference allows the study to identify structural tendencies in government communication practices rather than focusing on a single crisis case.

From a theoretical standpoint, corrective action offers reputational repair without escalating institutional vulnerability. Unlike mortification, it does not require explicit admission of wrongdoing. Unlike denial, it does not risk being perceived as dismissive. This strategic balance may explain why it emerges as the most dominant strategy. These findings are also consistent with previous studies indicating that Local government communication strategies tend to be operational and persuasive in responding to public programs, particularly when governments need to maintain policy legitimacy amid public demands (Zein & Utomo, 2025).

In addition, the dominance of corrective action in the Surabaya City Government's press releases may reflect the institutional characteristics of government communication. Public institutions are expected to demonstrate administrative capacity and policy responsiveness, making action-oriented communication strategies more appropriate than defensive

rhetoric. In practical terms, this suggests that government public relations units may strengthen institutional credibility by prioritizing messages that emphasize concrete solutions, policy adjustments, and service improvements.

4.2 The Supporting Role of Reducing Offensiveness

The relatively high presence of Reducing Offensiveness (30%) suggests that crisis communication also incorporates reputational reframing. According to Benoit (1995), reducing offensiveness attempts to mitigate negative perceptions by bolstering positive attributes, minimizing harm, or placing events in a broader context.

In this study, press releases frequently contextualized issues within ongoing development efforts, highlighted prior achievements, or emphasized comparative improvements. This indicates that corrective measures are often accompanied by narrative framing designed to stabilize public perception.

These findings are also consistent with earlier studies that highlight the role of narrative framing in reputation management. Rangga and Deslia (2025) argue that institutional image management through positive narratives and symbolic communication plays a significant role in sustaining public trust in digital public relations practices (Rangga & Deslia, 2025). Similarly, Oktarini and Atmadi (2020) show that tourism crisis communication strategies often combine operational responses with narrative framing to maintain stakeholder confidence (Oktarini & Atmadi, 2020)

However, the relatively high frequency of reducing offensiveness in this study may also be influenced by the communication format analyzed. Unlike crisis communication studies that examine interviews, press conferences, or social media interactions, this research focuses specifically on official press releases. Press releases often include contextual explanations and institutional achievements as part of their narrative structure, which may naturally increase the presence of reputational reframing strategies.

From a practical perspective, this finding suggests that government communication practitioners often combine corrective action with narrative framing to maintain public confidence. By presenting both solutions and contextual explanations, institutions can address public concerns while simultaneously reinforcing institutional credibility.

4.3 Limited Use of Evading Responsibility

The moderate presence of Evading Responsibility (12%) suggests selective attribution to external or uncontrollable factors. In Image Repair

Theory, this strategy includes defeasibility (lack of information or control) and accident (unintentional occurrence).

The limited use of this strategy contrasts with some crisis communication cases in corporate settings where organizations frequently attribute crises to external factors. For example, Safitri and Kemala (2019) reported that corporate crisis communication sometimes emphasizes external causes to minimize reputational damage. In contrast, the Surabaya City Government's communication appears to use this strategy more cautiously (Safitri & Kemala, 2019).

This difference may be explained by institutional accountability norms in public governance. Government institutions operate within democratic accountability frameworks where excessive blame shifting may undermine public trust. As a result, communication strategies that rely heavily on external attribution may be perceived negatively by the public.

4.4 Minimal Mortification and the Absence of Denial

The extremely low occurrence of Mortification (2%) and the complete absence of Denial (0%) are particularly significant.

The absence of denial contrasts with several corporate crisis communication studies where denial or partial denial is sometimes used as an initial response strategy. However, in public sector communication contexts, such strategies may carry higher political and reputational risks. Government institutions are expected to demonstrate responsiveness rather than confrontation when addressing public concerns.

Several factors may explain this pattern. First, denial may increase reputational risk if contradictory evidence emerges. Second, democratic governance norms emphasize transparency and responsiveness. Third, in the digital media environment where information circulates rapidly, denial can quickly be challenged by public scrutiny.

Similarly, the limited use of mortification may reflect institutional caution. Explicit apologies in governmental contexts may carry legal or political implications. Consequently, institutions may prefer corrective action strategies that demonstrate responsiveness without explicitly admitting fault.

4.5 Structural Constraints of Press Releases as a Medium

An important contextual factor influencing these findings is the structural nature of press releases as an official communication medium. Press releases are institutionally controlled, one-directional, formal, and designed for public record and media dissemination.

These characteristics inherently limit the range of expressive strategies available. Emotional or confrontational rhetoric, such as strong denial or expressive mortification, is less common in bureaucratic documents due to

their formal tone and institutional function. Consequently, strategies emphasizing administrative action and clarification are structurally more compatible with the press release format.

This observation also explains why the distribution of strategies identified in this study differs from many crisis communication studies that analyze interviews, press conferences, or social media communication. These more interactive communication platforms may allow a wider range of rhetorical strategies.

From a theoretical perspective, this study demonstrates how Image Repair Theory, originally developed in corporate contexts, can be applied to local government communication. At the same time, the findings suggest that public sector institutions may systematically privilege action-oriented strategies over defensive or emotive responses.

Overall, these findings contribute to crisis communication research by demonstrating that local government institutions tend to prioritize action-based communication strategies and administrative legitimacy when responding to public issues.

4.6 Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses solely on official press releases, which represent institutionally controlled communication and may not reflect broader crisis communication practices such as social media engagement or media interactions. Second, the study examines message structure rather than audience perception, meaning that the effectiveness of each strategy cannot be assessed. Third, the research period is limited to August–November 2024, which represents a specific administrative phase and may not capture long-term communication patterns. These limitations suggest that future research should incorporate multiple communication platforms, audience reception analysis, and longitudinal approaches.

4.7 Practical Implications

The findings provide practical implications for local government communication practitioners. First, emphasizing corrective action in crisis communication may strengthen public trust by demonstrating administrative responsiveness and problem-solving capacity. Second, combining corrective action with reducing offensiveness can help stabilize public perception while addressing operational issues. Third, avoiding denial in official press releases may reduce reputational risk in digital communication environments where public scrutiny is high. These implications suggest that government public relations units may prioritize action-based messaging and transparent communication strategies, while

also developing crisis communication guidelines that emphasize solution-based messaging and policy transparency when managing public issues.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the distribution of crisis communication strategies in official press releases issued by the Surabaya City Government between August and November 2024 using the framework of Image Repair Theory. The findings reveal a consistent strategic orientation characterized by the predominance of corrective action, followed by reducing offensiveness, while evading responsibility appears selectively, mortification is minimal, and denial is entirely absent. Rather than relying on confrontational or defensive responses, the government's official messaging during the observed period emphasizes problem resolution, administrative responsiveness, and policy adjustment.

The dominance of corrective action suggests that crisis communication in this local government context is structured around action-based legitimacy. Public issues are framed as operational challenges to be managed through institutional intervention rather than accusations to be rejected or contested. The limited presence of evading responsibility and mortification, alongside the complete absence of denial, indicates a cautious communicative posture that avoids overt confrontation or explicit admission of fault. This pattern reflects a preference for maintaining institutional stability through demonstrable action rather than rhetorical defense.

The findings also illustrate how Image Repair Theory can be productively applied within municipal governance contexts, while simultaneously revealing its contextual boundaries. In contrast to corporate settings where rhetorical defense may play a central role, local government crisis communication appears to be more closely aligned with administrative practice and bureaucratic accountability. The formal and one-directional structure of press releases further shapes the strategic repertoire available, suggesting that institutional communication formats influence the distribution of image repair strategies.

From a practical standpoint, the study indicates that emphasizing concrete corrective measures may function as a primary mechanism for sustaining credibility in public governance. However, the restrained use of apology and the absence of denial also highlight the careful balance required in governmental communication, where legal, political, and institutional considerations intersect.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis is confined to official press releases and does not capture broader communicative

interactions such as social media engagement or media framing. The study focuses on message structure rather than audience reception or effectiveness, and the research period represents a specific administrative phase that may not reflect long-term strategic patterns. Although inter-coder reliability was high, the categorization of dominant strategies inevitably involves interpretative judgment.

Taken together, the study provides an empirical account of how crisis communication strategies are structured within a local government's official messaging during a defined period. While not making claims regarding effectiveness, the findings contribute to a clearer understanding of strategy distribution in public sector crisis communication and suggest avenues for further theoretical integration with institutional legitimacy and political communication perspectives.

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