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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Strategy for Resolution of Racism Conflict against Papuan Students in Surabaya (2019) with a Crisis Communication Approach by the Governments of Papua, East Java, and Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  *Corresponding Authors: ichsanmuhammadabduh473@gmail.com has_ullah@yahoo.com	This study examines the impact of racism cases against Papuan students in Surabaya in 2019 using a crisis communication theory approach. This study was conducted through a literature study method that connects the incident with various references, such as journals, books, and relevant news. The focus is on analyzing the causes, handling, and efforts to resolve the conflict carried out by the government. The results of the study show that the government has implemented several crisis communication steps. One of them is to slow down internet access in several areas affected by the conflict. This policy aims to prevent the spread of hoax information that can worsen the situation and limit certain parties who spread provocation. In addition, the central government, the Papua region, and East Java are working together to address the impact of the conflict in Surabaya, while security in Papua is strengthened through coordination with the Regional Police. The government also emphasizes the legal process against perpetrators of racism as a form of commitment to justice and protection of human rights. This study is expected to provide insight into improving crisis communication strategies in dealing with racism issues in the future, so that a more harmonious society is created, free from discrimination, and upholds the values of unity.

INTRODUCTION

The celebration of Independence Day is the most awaited moment by all Indonesian people without exception from Sabang to Merauke, but who would have thought that the 74th anniversary celebration at that time, precisely in 2019, was a moment that had quite a painful emotional impact in coloring a special day for the Republic of Indonesia. Precisely in August 2019, as usual, Indonesia prepared itself to celebrate the Independence Day of the Republic of Indonesia which falls on August 17. This lively and enthusiastic activity began at the beginning of the month, where various regions in Indonesia, both in big cities and rural areas, decorated the environment with independence-themed decorations. Houses, offices, and public spaces were filled with the Red and White flag and various knick-knacks that symbolized national pride. One of the activities regulated by national law is the obligation to install the Red and White Flag in every house and public facility, which is stated in Law Number 24 of 2009.

However, behind the spirit of independence that unites the nation, a heartbreaking event occurred in the city of Surabaya that damaged the harmony of society. In August 2019, a racist incident accompanied by hate speech and racial discrimination occurred in a Papuan student dormitory in Surabaya. This incident became a national spotlight, because it threatened the peace of Papuan students who were studying outside their region. In this case, the problem started with the installation of the Red and White Flag in the Papuan dormitory which was considered inappropriate

by several individuals, because the flag installation process was not right, the position was not correct, and the flagpole broke. Then this sparked anger from several parties, which led to an incident of discrimination and hate speech against Papuan students. Several parties considered that Papuan students were forced to raise the flag in a way that was considered correct, and in the process there were racist actions directed at them.

This incident invited pros and cons in Indonesian society. For some people, this was considered an inappropriate act, considering that the Independence Day of the Republic of Indonesia should be a time full of respect and a spirit of unity. However, for some other groups, the incident actually increased tensions between certain ethnic groups in Indonesia, especially between indigenous Papuans and other groups. This action led to increasingly widespread social unrest, and this incident eventually became one of the peaks of a fairly large racial conflict in Indonesia. As a result of the incident, large-scale demonstrations occurred in various regions of Indonesia, especially in Papua and West Papua. In Papua, the protests grew stronger, even developing into anarchic actions that damaged public facilities, including government buildings and military infrastructure. Clashes between people involved in the protests and security forces were inevitable. Papuans outside Papua, especially in Surabaya, felt that they had been insulted and treated unfairly, and this created a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the government and people outside Papua.

Not only that, this problem was also triggered by the spread of incorrect information (hoaxes) and hate speech on social media and other communication platforms. Many people were provoked by information that was not necessarily true, and ended up participating in the demonstrations. The issue of division between Papuans and non-Papuans, who are often considered as immigrants in Papua, is heating up. Non-Papuans who have long lived in Papua have also been affected, with some of them becoming targets of hatred and violence. The government, both at the regional level such as the Papua and East Java Provincial Governments, as well as the central government, must immediately intervene to ease the tensions that have occurred. They face a major challenge in handling this widespread conflict, considering that the issues that have emerged have gone far beyond the racism that occurred in Surabaya. The people of Papua, both indigenous Papuans (OAP) and non-Papuans, are starting to be divided in their views on this incident, which makes efforts to resolve it even more complicated.

One of the factors that worsens the situation is the spread of inaccurate and hateful information. When hoaxes and hate speech spread widely, emotional reactions from the public increase. Many people feel that they must act to defend their group, both as Papuans and as part of the Indonesian nation. This makes the situation increasingly difficult to control, and increases tensions between ethnic groups in the Papua region, and even outside Papua. This tension has also spread to the West Papua region, where many non-Papuans have taken to the streets to show solidarity with the Papuan people who feel oppressed. Although many non-Papuans in Papua support the protests against racism, there is still a perception that this conflict is a problem between indigenous Papuans and immigrants, which makes things worse.

This uncontrolled spread of information has finally prompted the government to take more decisive steps in dealing with the crisis that has occurred. Crisis communication is a very important tool to ease this tension. Crisis communication is a practice that includes collecting, processing, and disseminating information to overcome a crisis situation that occurs, especially in social conflicts that affect many parties. In this case, the government needs to play an active role in providing clear explanations, as well as reducing the anxiety and concerns that are growing among the community. According to experts, effective crisis communication must be able to reach people's emotions and provide information that can calm them, not just based on facts or figures. This is important because in a crisis situation, people tend to be more responsive to their feelings, rather than information that is rational and logical. Therefore, crisis communication must be able to speak directly to people's emotions, and provide empathy and sympathy for those affected. Handling this crisis not only solves problems at a practical level, but must also provide a sense of security and comfort to the community

involved in the conflict. In this case, efforts to overcome the spread of hoaxes and hate speech are very important so that tensions do not spread further. In addition, the government must also strive to maintain relations between various ethnic groups in Papua, both between OAP and non-Papuans and between immigrants and indigenous Papuans.

Based on the events that occurred, this study aims to analyze the crisis communication strategies applied in handling the case of racism against Papuan students in Surabaya in 2019. This study will also evaluate how various parties, such as the Papuan government, the East Java government, and the central government, faced and handled this crisis. By understanding how crisis communication can be applied properly, it is hoped that more effective solutions can be found in overcoming similar social tensions and racial conflicts in the future.

Crisis Communication

A crisis is an unpredictable event, a major threat that can have a negative impact on an organization, industry, or stakeholders if not handled properly (Coombs 1998 in Upadhyay, S, & Upadhyay, N, 2023). Thus, considerable attention is needed to research on crises, crisis management, and crisis communication, because crises can cause financial and reputational losses for companies. Thus, the main objective in implementing crisis communication basically refers to "reducing losses" that a company/organization could potentially incur, not directly focusing on the impact on its external factors. This is what then led to the birth of a follow-up theory in the form of The Image Restoration Theory which is a concept about the practice of restoring the image of a company/organization, which when connected in practice, this concept is used to rebuild the image of an institution to rise from problems and emerge as a new face that is more professional.

Problems in implementing crisis communication reveal the need to understand how leaders/power holders collect, disseminate, and adapt important information through understanding the type of crisis and the needs of the local community. This theory links leaders' responses with strategies that emphasize adaptation to the needs of the local community and the type of crisis, although the adaptation factor is sometimes ignored because of the demand for speed in realizing the right policy, which ultimately crisis communication will always adjust to conditions and always change in a short period of time (Haupt, 2021). Coombs (2022) emphasized that the basic ethics in responding to an event is to prioritize adjustment and instructing information first as the first step in every crisis.

In practice, crisis communication must be preceded by the implementation of risk communication first, Kim, J.H et al (2022) describe that crisis communication arises when risk communication is unable to contain a problem, which means that failed risk communication will then cause a crisis, and that is where crisis communication is needed, thus the crisis is placed as a further stage of uncontrolled risk (Mheidly & Fares, 2020). However, it is undeniable that crisis communication and risk are two concepts that cannot be separated through the right communication practice approach.

In the context of government, crisis communication is required to be fast and responsive because it is related to the conditions of many people, both in responding to negative issues against government institutions, and in handling cases that occur in society. This factor is related to the context of society as the target of policy, so that appropriate regulations indicate the success of the Government in showing responsiveness to its people in every problem, one of which is in conditions of conflict between population groups. Similar to public policy theory, crisis communication must be based on the interests of the community, thus a community approach is important by directly involving government actors in the problems that occur, so that the regulations made are based on the reality needed by the community with a multivocal approach, not just limited to the perception and/or interests of the leadership (Frandsen and Johansen, 2018).

METHOD

This study was conducted using a qualitative method supported by a literature review approach as its main framework. This approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth studies based on

information available from various trusted sources, both in the form of scientific literature and media reports. The main sources of information include accredited journals, reference books, and articles published by print and digital mass media. This study specifically focuses on the case of racism that befell Papuan students in Surabaya in 2019, with the aim of evaluating the crisis communication strategies implemented by various parties in responding to the conflict.

The initial step in this research is to collect data from various sources that have high relevance to the theme being studied. Primary data was obtained through scientific journals related to crisis communication theory, reference books, and previous research documents discussing similar issues. Meanwhile, secondary data was collected from online and printed news that documented various events related to the racism case against Papuan students in Surabaya. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the data, the sources used were selected selectively. Only information from official platforms, recognized journals, and media with good reputations was included in the analysis. In this way, the research is expected to be able to provide a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being raised.

The next stage is to analyze the collected data using the crisis communication theory approach. This analysis begins by studying selected documents, such as scientific journals, books, and media reports that are considered to have a direct relationship to the conflict phenomenon. Relevant data is then evaluated based on the crisis communication theory framework to understand the strategic steps taken by various government parties in dealing with the situation. This analysis not only focuses on the actions that have been taken, but also evaluates the extent to which these steps are effective in reducing the negative impacts of the conflict, including the spread of hoax news, increasing social tensions, and protests. This approach provides an opportunity to see how crisis communication policies are applied in complex contexts, such as the issue of racism that involves many parties and has an impact on a national scale.

The conclusions drawn are not only intended to provide an understanding of the events that have occurred, but also to provide practical recommendations for the development of crisis communication strategies in the future. This research is expected to provide a significant contribution in understanding how crisis communication theory is applied in the real world, especially in the context of handling sensitive issues such as racism. The findings of this study are expected to be a reference for the government, educational institutions, and other organizations in managing similar conflicts in the future. With a wiser, more strategic approach, and based on deep understanding, it is hoped that conflicts of this kind can be handled more effectively and humanely. Through in-depth research and comprehensive analysis, this study seeks to answer the major challenges in managing crisis communication, especially in the context of cultural diversity and social dynamics in Indonesia.

DISCUSSION

1. Crisis Communication's Strategy

a. Slowdown to Termination of Internet Accessibility by the Ministry of Communication and Information

The racism case that occurred in the Papuan student dormitory in Surabaya in August 2019, right before the commemoration of Indonesian Independence Day, not only caused unrest in Surabaya, but also triggered tensions in various regions in Indonesia, including Papua. This issue quickly spread on various social media platforms, triggering various reactions throughout Indonesia, especially in Papua and West Papua. Various large demonstrations took place as a form of protest against the discriminatory actions experienced by Papuan students, which peaked in Papua and West Papua. Seeing the potential for an escalation of the increasingly heated conflict, the government through the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kemkominfo) decided to take strategic steps to control this situation, one of which was by restricting internet access in the West Papua region.

The internet access restrictions began with bandwidth throttling on August 19, 2019 and were further tightened with a complete internet access blockade on August 21, 2019, which mainly applied to areas considered prone to conflict. This step was taken to prevent the spread of information that could worsen the situation, especially images and videos circulating on social media depicting violence, hate speech, and increasingly widespread hoaxes. The government is trying to suppress content such as graphic videos or baseless images of victims of violence, accompanied by hate narratives, from spreading further, which could worsen social tensions in society. However, although this policy aims to control the situation, there are various views that criticize the implementation of this policy.

One of the main criticisms came from the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), which considered that the internet blockade in Papua actually worsened the situation and violated citizens' rights to obtain legitimate information. YLBHI argued that, although the spread of hoaxes and hate speech is indeed a serious problem, this blocking policy tends to be unfair, because it is focused on certain areas such as Papua, while in other regions in Indonesia, hoaxes and hate speech continue to circulate without any concrete steps to address them. According to YLBHI, this policy actually limits the freedom of Papuan people to communicate and worsens the already tense situation, so that many parties feel isolated and unable to obtain accurate information about the situation in their area.

In addition, this policy has had a significant impact on the economy in West Papua. Most business sectors in West Papua depend on internet access to carry out business and administrative activities. The internet blockade implemented by the Ministry of Communication and Information disrupts local economic activities, hinders communication between business actors, and slows down administrative processes, including in the government sector which also relies on internet connections for various public service interests and internal coordination. Many entrepreneurs have complained that this policy has actually created economic uncertainty, while the general public has difficulty accessing important information related to their daily needs.

b.   *Coordination and Communication for Security Assistance in West Papua*

In addition to efforts to control the flow of information, the next step taken by the Government is to secure areas that are considered prone to conflict. In an effort to reduce tensions and control the increasingly heated situation, the National Police are working together with several Regional Police from other regions in Indonesia, including the North Sulawesi Regional Police, the South Sulawesi Regional Police, the Maluku Regional Police, and the Southeast Sulawesi Regional Police. Based on data from the Police, each Regional Police involved has sent hundreds of Brimob personnel to maintain security stability in several points most affected by the conflict, such as the capital of West Papua, Manokwari, and Sorong City.

In Manokwari, for example, 190 Brimob personnel from the North Sulawesi Regional Police have been assigned to maintain order, while in Sorong City, around 200 Brimob personnel from the South Sulawesi Regional Police and 190 personnel from the Bali Regional Police have played a role in securing the area. The deployment of these troops is part of a strategic effort to reduce tensions and anticipate the possibility of further violence due to the escalating racist incidents. This security support is very important, because in a crisis situation, good coordination between security forces and local governments is needed to maintain order and respond to the situation quickly and appropriately. Coordination between local governments and the police supported by various parties, including the military, is one of the important aspects in crisis control efforts.

With this significant security support, it is expected to ease tensions and prevent the conflict from escalating. In crisis management, communication and coordination between various parties are very important. As stated by Harrison (2005), in a crisis, effective communication management plays a major role in reducing conflict escalation and creating a sense of security

for the community. In this case, effective security and clear communication between the central government, local governments, and security forces can help control and prevent a larger crisis.

c.   Action Against Individuals Involved in Racism Cases in Surabaya

Firm action against individuals involved in the racist incident is an important step in an effort to reduce the tension that occurred. To that end, the government immediately took legal steps against the parties suspected of being responsible for the incident. Several suspects have been named, including S.A, who is suspected of committing hate speech and discriminatory actions, T.S who was involved in spreading hate speech, and A.A who spread hoax videos that worsened the situation (Merdeka.com, 2019). These three suspects have gone through the legal process and were sentenced in accordance with applicable regulations.

This firm action is considered one way to reduce the escalation of the conflict and provide a clear message to the public that discriminatory actions and the spread of hatred are unacceptable in society. In addition, this step also helps reduce the widespread tension in Papua and Surabaya, because the public feels that there are clear and transparent actions against the perpetrators of racism. The resolution of the conflict that begins with this legal step can also provide a sense of justice for the affected parties, especially for Papuan students who were victims of the incident.

2. Othes Steps

As part of a more comprehensive resolution effort, the Central Government through the President's Special Staff, Lenis Kogoya, provided three recommendations to help ease the ongoing tensions in West Papua. The recommendations include:

a.   Improvement of Papua Dormitory in Surabaya

As an initial step to restore a sense of security for Papuan students living in Surabaya, the government plans to renovate the dormitories damaged by the incident. Renovating these dormitories is considered an important step to ensure that Papuan students feel protected and can continue their education without feeling threatened.

b.   Papuan Student Development

Papuan student development is also one of the main focuses of the government's recommendations. The development in question includes training and counseling on tolerance, cultural diversity, and the importance of maintaining social relations between ethnicities and races in Indonesia. This development is expected to help Papuan students overcome various forms of discrimination and increase their understanding of how to live in a pluralistic society..

c.   Civil Servant Recruitment Agreement

One of the positive steps proposed by the government is to provide an opportunity for Papuan students to join the selection of Civil Servant Candidates (CPNS) after they graduate from college. This is an effort to empower Papuan students and give them a greater opportunity to pursue a career in government, both in Papua and outside Papua.

The West Papua Regional Government and the Central Government have implemented various crisis communication strategies in dealing with the conflict that occurred in the Papua region. One of the steps that has received attention is the restriction of internet access, which is carried out by reducing bandwidth until finally cutting off internet access completely in several areas. This policy is seen by the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kemkominfo) as an emergency measure to suppress the spread of fake news (hoaxes) that can heat up the situation. This action also aims to inhibit the spread of information that triggers tension, especially that which contains hate speech, both against certain groups and the government.

In addition, this step was taken to limit the mass media and online media that often utilize uploads from local people on social media platforms. The government hopes that by breaking the chain of dissemination of information that is considered dangerous, the situation in Papua can be more controlled. On the other hand, this policy is also intended to prevent the escalation of the conflict which is increasingly difficult to control. However, this restriction has drawn criticism because it is considered to eliminate the rights of the Papuan people to obtain and convey information, as guaranteed in Article 28F of the 1945 Constitution. The conflict that is rooted in the racism case in Surabaya is one example of how the government needs to develop a more mature and humane communication strategy. While internet shutdowns may be effective in the short term, they do not address the core of the problem. Instead, they create unrest in society and exacerbate the lack of transparency about the real situation on the ground.

The government should adopt a more comprehensive crisis communication approach to address this issue, especially considering that racism in Papua is a long-standing problem. Law Number 40 of 2008 concerning the Elimination of Racial and Ethnic Discrimination states that the main objective of the policy is to create a peaceful, harmonious and just life. Therefore, the steps taken should be in line with this objective, not just reactive emergency measures. Moving forward, the government needs to focus on building open dialogue with the Papuan people and empowering them to play a role in finding solutions to the conflicts that occur. This approach, if implemented consistently, will not only be able to reduce tensions but also encourage the creation of better relations between the community and the government. With a wiser communication strategy based on the principle of justice, it is hoped that the conflict and discrimination in Papua can be resolved in a more sustainable manner.

CONCLUSION

There are three main steps of crisis communication strategy that will be immediately taken by the Papuan Government, East Java Government, and Central Government. These three parties have complementary roles in efforts to overcome the impact of the conflict that arose due to racist actions against West Papuan students in Surabaya. The following are details of the steps including (a) Steps by the Central Government through the Ministry of Communication and Information (Kemkominfo), through Kemkominfo, taking the initiative to immediately communicate and coordinate with the Papuan Government. One of the concrete steps taken is to slow down internet access (bandwidth) in a number of areas affected by the conflict, even to the point of completely cutting off access in areas experiencing the worst escalation of the conflict. This policy aims to prevent the spread of inaccurate information or hoaxes. Hoaxes spread through social media and other platforms are considered to be able to worsen the situation, both locally, nationally, and internationally. By reducing the potential for the spread of fake news, the government hopes to ease tensions and suppress the escalation of the conflict. (b) Coordination of the Papuan and East Java governments, where the Papuan Government is communicating intensively with the East Java Government. The aim is to encourage the acceleration of the legal process against the perpetrators of racism who are the main triggers of the conflict. Handling this case is an important part of demonstrating the government's seriousness in upholding human rights, including the right to live free from racial discrimination. This step is expected to provide a sense of justice for the Papuan people and strengthen public trust in the government's commitment to handling sensitive issues. And the last is (c) carrying out cooperation between the Papuan Government, East Java, and the Central Government in Increasing Security, with the three parties synergizing in increasing security efforts in Papua. Through communication and coordination with the relevant Regional Police (Polda), a number of security officers were sent to Papua to provide additional security support. This step was taken to control the increasingly heated situation due to demonstrations and anarchism that emerged in response to the racism case in Surabaya. Increasing security is expected to create stability in conflict areas, while providing a sense of security to the local community.

In addition to the main strategy, a number of supporting steps are also taken to strengthen crisis communication in dealing with the impact of this case. These steps include (a) Papuan Student Development, where the Government seeks to provide development to Papuan students who are studying outside their home region. This development aims to form a wise, adaptive character that is able to interact harmoniously with the local community. This step is important to create a good relationship between Papuan students and the indigenous population in the diaspora. (b) The renovation of the Papuan dormitory which was the location of the racist act, the purpose of the renovation is to create a more decent and comfortable environment. This step is also a symbol of the government's commitment to improving relations with the Papuan community, and (c) offering great opportunities in accepting CPNS as a form of concrete support for the development of Papuan human resources. This aims to motivate them to continue to improve their capacity and contribute to development in their home region.

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