

Bonding Emotional Appeal as Strategic Digital Communication of State-Owned Enterprises

Heni Indrayani¹, Candra Yudha Satriya², Rahmawati Zulfiningrum³, Adybah Bryana Sanggita⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Communication Science, Universitas Dian Nuswantoro Semarang - Indonesia

heni.indrayani@dsn.dinus.ac.id

ABSTRACT. This study aims to describe how to build emotions through digital content as a corporate communication strategy by State-Owned Enterprises. The pandemic covid-19 has engendered unprecedented situation that pose enormous challenges to corporate communication in their messages to stakeholders. State-Owned Enterprises can no longer do their stakeholders engagements with “business as usual” approaches without being perceived as uncaring and unempathetic in the situation of crisis. The consumer insight data mentions that more than two-third of respondents admitted that they will lose trust in a certain product brand or company that are more concern on the profit during the covid-19 period. Through the in-depth interview to a number of PR practitioners of state-owned companies and content analysis of top five active social media State-Owned Enterprises contributes, this research found that Public Relations activities are indeed somewhat altered in the time of pandemic crisis. Their engagement in social media content are having more emphasize on emotional supports and convey empathic feelings to the people who suffer because of the virus, and provide more message of support on effort to reduction the risk cause by corona virus. The narrative of digital content is told in a coherent and fidelity. Narrative of digital content such as family oriented, togetherness, being romantic, thrill seeking, struggle, optimism, salvation, commitment and carefulness is a way to having positive relationships with stakeholders. Hence, the pandemic crisis has also brought changes in the ways in which PR practitioners engage with their public, and alter the content of their messages from profit-interest communication to emphatic communication.

KEYWORDS: digital communication; emotional appeal; narrative; persuasive approach; state-owned enterprises

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic demands a transformation of public relations. Information is provided on a digital basis as an effort to connect with stakeholders. This is based on government policies regarding the increasing number of COVID-19 cases. Based on distribution data compiled by the Task Force for the Acceleration of Response as of July 15, 2022, in Indonesia, 6,057,142 were confirmed positive for the corona virus, 5,997,022 recovered, and 156,662 died. To reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 in Indonesia, the government has implemented several policies such as large-scale social distancing, working from home for civil servants, private employees. online learning classes for the education service industry, and creating strict health protocols that involve residents to use masks when outside, gloves, maintain hand hygiene by using hand sanitizer and soap (as the new normal health habit), and maintain social distance when they are in a public place or in a crowd.

Understanding the existing conditions, many companies from various business industries in Indonesia are engaged in both the health sector and not (outside the health industry or medical companies) to participate intensely in communicating the contents of health protocols in a unique, creative, and empathetic way in an emotional way. This phenomenon is in accordance with the Edelman Trust Barometer 2020 Special Report: Brand Trust and The Corona Virus survey conducted by Daniel J. Edelman Holdings

on 23-26 March 2020 in 12 countries, which stated that 30% of respondents (customers) chose to stop using certain product brands. because the company did not take proper action during the Covid-19 pandemic. In terms of customer insights, 77% of respondents admitted that they would lose confidence in certain product brands or companies that pay more attention to the value of profits during the covid-19 period.

According to Tantri Kadiman Beekelaar, Head of Corporate and Public Affairs of Edelman Indonesia, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way consumers view the reference brands or products they have been using. Nowadays consumers pay more attention to emotions. Based on Edelman survey shows that companies have an important and crucial role to help the country in overcoming the Covid-19 crisis and 55% of them also think that companies are more serious than the government in dealing with it. covid-19 during this period. Therefore, a state-owned company has a role as a system integrator to maintain the country's economic stability. State-Owned Enterprises maintain domestic production so that they are able to create added value and open up job opportunities and capital growth so that the economy can recover. Reporting from *beritasatu.com*, State-Owned Enterprises contributed to state revenues of Rp 55.51 trillion from tax payments and Rp 31.43 trillion as Non-Tax State Revenue in the first quarter of 2020. The strategic contribution of this BUMN then sought communication so that it remained trusted by the public during the first quarter of 2020. The Covid 19 pandemic. Public Relations are required to adapt quickly, be creative, data-based, and be able to build emotional, compassionate, and empathetic communication in line with the fact that they are distributed through mainstream media as well as owned media. Because basically the function in managerial Public Relations means connecting the interests of the organization and its public at various levels, both for consumers, distributors, or workers in the organization (Indrayani et al., 2020). In addition, they must be proactive in all matters relating to customer perceptions of a product or brand, news on Covid-19 developments, and customer expectations.

Based on data from the Ministry of SOEs, there are five BUMN companies that contribute the most to their social media activity, namely Bank BTN, Pegadaian, Petrokimia Gresik, BNI and Telkom Indonesia. This state-owned company actively approaches its stakeholders by optimizing digital media. The social role of advocating efforts is to “use” the media and other channels, to take advantage of the functions of mass communication channels to deliver messages that will reach the audience in its fullest form (Barney & Winder, 1994). During this pandemic they have the opportunity to build trust and strengthen engagement not only with customers, but also the internal team (employees), and the community around the company. The importance of engagement is to understand the wider community (Boyd, 2007; (Motion, Heath, & Leitch, 2016). Therefore, persuasive communication is one way to convey messages during the COVID-19 pandemic. Persuasion is used to influence others by modifying beliefs, values, attitudes, and behavior (Page & Parnel, 2019). This is because discourse in the digital world is now a key factor in building representations of reality and social relationships (Sarabia-Panol & Sison, 2016). Previous research discussed the impact of persuasive online messages seen from the motivation of active users of social media (Taylor et al., 2020), narrative research in crisis communication using experimental methods (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013), narrative research in crisis communication using experimental methods (Choi & Toma, 2014). Meanwhile, research on strategies for building emotional bonds from the side of persuasive message makers has not been carried out. Therefore, the author will analyze how to build emotions through digital content as a corporate communication strategy by State-Owned Enterprises

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Narrative Theory

The theory used in this study is narrative theory, which frames the phenomenon according to the frame of mind of the messenger. Narrative is a fundamental human quality. In other words, human beings "experience and understand life as an ongoing series of narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends." (Heath, 2013). The public wants to hear the stories created and presented by the organization (Seeger & Sellnow, 2016; (Clementson, 2020). This is based on an understanding of public relations which is defined as the practice of telling stories and managing stories (Clementson, 2020).

Human communication follows the format of the story, with the characters involved in the plot sequence. Therefore, we must consider all communication as stories, whatever their form, because we

interpret and incorporate them into our life stories. Basically, we understand our lives by crafting stories, making different experiences work as a whole. That is, knowledge is narratively configured, that is, interpreting experiences and describing them to others through stories. A lot of collaborative work with others takes place in creating stories. Therefore, narrative is a co-creation, reflecting our own and others' views. Then, the processes involved in narrative construction and meaning-making are not static; instead, some type of information processing and attribution is at work. In the context of organizations, these narratives try to understand and describe themselves to others in order to recreate the narrated identity. Organizations tell stories about who they are, what their jobs are, who their stakeholders are, and who their competitors are, all of this forms a certain identity or identity (Heath, 2013).

Application of narrative by Public Relations put forward by Barry Brummett (Heath, 2013), that public relations involves "the practice of telling and managing stories that tell about people, institutions and groups". Organizations can adopt or seek to influence people's narratives with what they said and perform." (Heath, 2000). From narrative theory, organizations are seen as "providing a 'plot' that is always in the process of recreation than existing as a sedentary script." (Fisher, 1987: 8). Hence, organizations and practitioners of Public Relations use existing views and public opinion as resources or seek to change them through new narratives. Practitioners work with internal and external stakeholders in creating shared meaning through *stories told*, stories adopted, and stories *remembered*.

3. METHOD

Method for this study include qualitative content analysis. A purposive sample of Instagram post from 198 post official account State Owned Enterprises Instagram were used to develop an a priori coding scheme for the follow-up content analysis. Data collection observed from @bankbtn (15 post), @pegadaian_id (22 post), @petrokimiagresik_official (53 post), @bni46 (49 post) and @telkomindonesia (59 post). Post were coded from theme of post, engagement rate, number of public comments, and the valence of public comments. The data analysis to identify, process and analysis documents to understand their meaning, significance and relevance from "text"

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Digital Communication as a Communication Strategy

The principle of strategic communication informs us that although the affected individual does not directly communicate with the organization, the individual can seek information from direct or mediated sources as well as active and connected influencers, and thus can be persuaded. Basically, persuasive communication aims to persuade the public to empathize with the purpose of communication (Zhu et al., 2017).

Before developing a persuasive message in social media, Public Relations practitioners must first determine what attractiveness or value they want to convey in reaching the hearts of the public (Heath, 2013). Therefore, it requires emotional attraction tailored to the needs of the public. Persuasive techniques include testimonials, support, or other factual information. This can be identified from the engagement rate from social media. The key is to choose the most appropriate one for the target audience based on the analysis carried out. The way to convey a persuasive message should be sincere and convey sincere feelings and emotions, especially if someone gives a testimonial or comments.

Table 1. Mapping State Owned Enterprises Instagram Content

| | BTN | Pegadaian | Petrokimia Gresik | Telkom Indonesia | BNI |
|--------------------------|---------|-----------|---------------------------|------------------|----------|
| Instagram Account | bankbtn | pegadaian | Petrokimiagresik_official | telkomindonesia | bni46 |
| Grade | B- | B- | B- | B | B |
| Engagement rate | 0,25 % | 0,50% | 0,23% | 0,12% | 0,16% |
| Average Likes | 490,88 | 950,94 | 153,19 | 611,50 | 1,339.62 |
| Average Comments | 101,25 | 20,56 | 0,38 | 15,63 | 432,44 |
| Follower | 235k | 195k | 65k | 539k | 1M |
| Post | 1976 | 755 | 2190 | 2936 | 5328 |

From the table, it can be seen that Pegadaian are the corporations that are most involved with their followers. This is in line with research on the impact of online persuasion which illustrates that individuals process persuasive information online according to their goals, based on motivation, rather than evaluating the actions taken. (Taylor et al., 2020).

The relevance of Pegadaian's content to daily life makes followers establish relationships to share their social experiences, namely about their financial management experiences due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Social sharing is defined as the process of communicating with others about significant emotional experiences and about the events that trigger those experiences (Rimé, 2009; (Choi & Toma, 2014). An emotional experience is an event or problem that gives rise to positive or negative emotions (Gable & Reis, 2010; Garrison & Kahn, 2010; Reis et al., 2010). The emotional involvement of the content on social media is shown by the presence of comments and responses from the public. Basically the public feels “*mental sensation of engagement*” (Lim et al., 2020).

4.2. Emotional Bonding during Pandemic Covid-19

1. Telling Compelling Stories

Public relations expert must be a mediator, creator, conceptor, as at once to be a communicator by optimizing and empowering what is and develops in the society. As part of Indonesian society, State Owned Enterprises are used to fostering direct relationships. Human touch is a very important part of daily lives. There are four step to keep trust amid covid-19 including show up and do your part; don't act alone, solve don't sell; and communicate with emotion, compassion, and facts. The content in Instagram uploads is adjusted to the government's recommendations in terms of health protocols. This is based on the fact that Storytelling “has the power to move people” (Kent, 2015).

2. Component a Good Story

When stories that moves people, instagrams content must be consist of emplotment, which is the kind of story you are telling. There are several stories including Health Protocol, New Normal Behavior, National economic recovery. Emotional bonding is to persuade people who lack motivation or ability (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Di Blasio & Milani, 2008)

3. Identification: Making Connection with Audience

To be able to connect with their audience, SMEs use hashtags as a way of visibility of content. This is based on Burke's thinking that symbols construct reality. Hashtags about togetherness and encouragement become a way of communicating expressing a collective sense of mutual reputation (Scott, 2007).

Tabel 2. Hashtag of State-Owned Enterprises Instagram

| | BTN | Pegadaian | Petrokimia Gresik | Telkom Indonesia | BNI |
|----------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| Hashtag | #CovidSafeBUMN #BTNCegahCorona #BTNAtasiCorona #RuangKeluargaBTN #OverheardRuangKeluarga #IndonesiaberSATU #BUMNHadirUntukNegeri | #IndonesiaBersatu #BUMNAtasiCorona #InsyaAllahAdaJalan #SerentakJagaJarak #KesehatanPulihEkonomiBangkit #BUMNUntukIndonesia #PegadaianTanggapCorona | #IndonesiaberSATU #BUMNAtasiCorona #SerentakJagaJarak #Pisayangkeluarga #BersamaKitaHadaPI #SiapPGantikebiasaan | #SemuaBisaBerubahMaju #SelaluAda #UntukIndonesia #BUMNAtasiCorona #SelaluAdaSemangat | #IndonesiaBersatu #BUMNAtasiCorona #KesehatanPulihEkonomiPulih #AntarkanSemangat #BNI46 #BNItuDigital |

4. Form: structuring a good story

There are several forms of content in creating stories, such as: (1) animated video, (2) infographics, (3) comic, (4) quiz/trivia, (5) podcast, (6) poster. As Heath (2000) argued “Society has a narrative past that gives a sense of what is good about society and what needs change. Public relations adds values to the narrative of society as it carves out meaning and encourages others to adopt that meaning”

5. Master Plot

There are several master plot of covid-19 content, such as: (1) family oriented, (2) togetherness: we not me, (3) being romantic, (3) thrill seeking, (4) struggle, (5) optimism, (6) salvation, (7) commitment, (8) carefulness.

CONCLUSION

State Owned Enterprises involvement in social media especially Instagram content places more emphasis on emotional support and conveying feelings of empathy to people who are suffering from the virus, as well as providing more messages of support in efforts to reduce risk due to the corona virus. The message about family oriented, togetherness, being romantic, thrill seeking, dtruggle, optimism, salvation, commitment and carefulness is a way to having positive relationships with stakeholders. Through social media content, State Owned Enterprises support government policies in taking security measures to reduce the risks posed by the virus. Hence, the pandemic crisis has also brought about changes in the way public relations change the content of their messages from profit-interest communication to emotional and empathic communication.

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