.

STRATEGY FOR REPUTATION MANAGEMENT OF THE POLICE INSTITUTION IN THE MIDST OF WIDESPREAD DIGITAL DISINFORMATION BY ANTI-GOVERNMENT GROUPS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Wahyu Agung Nusantoro[1], Lasminiasih[2]

Faculty of Economics, Department of Management, Universitas Terbuka
Faculty of Economics, Department of Management, Gunadarma University

Corresponding author: Smadawahyu@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to examine the reputation management strategies implemented by the Indonesian National Police (Polri) in addressing digital disinformation that impacts public trust, particularly among anti-government groups. The method used in this study is qualitative descriptive, with data collection techniques involving documentation studies and interviews with relevant parties in the public relations (PR) sector of Polri. The results of this study indicate that Polri can implement several important strategies, including: utilizing official social media to communicate clarifications and educational information, collaborating with content creators and digital literacy activists to combat hoaxes, enhancing digital communication competencies among personnel, and revitalizing social media management at the regional level. These efforts demonstrate effectiveness in responding to disinformation attacks, although challenges such as the spread of manipulative content and negative framing continue to persist.

Keywords: Institutional Reputation, Digital Disinformation, Polri, Communication Strategy, Social Media

Introduction

The evolution of information technology has brought about a radical transformation in societal communication behaviors. People now receive information and express their freedom of speech through social media. The advantage of this approach is that individuals have quick and widespread access to information. However, on the other hand, social media has also become a fertile ground for the spread of harmful information and the intentional dissemination of fake news to influence negative perceptions. Indeed, certain parties use disinformation to shape public opinion regarding state institutions, including the Indonesian National Police (Polri). Polri's role as the frontline in maintaining security and order faces significant challenges in gaining public trust. The flow of disinformation online, particularly against Polri by anti-government communities, has intensified the polarization of opinions among the public. Various provocative, manipulative narratives, and defamation spread through electronic media, including social media platforms like "X," Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. This not only tarnishes the institution's reputation but can also hinder Polri's operations in the field due to a lack of social legitimacy perceived by the public.

Based on this, the research problems to be discussed in this study are: What are the forms and characteristics of digital disinformation against Polri as an institution on social media? What reputation management efforts are being made by Polri to counter digital disinformation attacks from anti-government elements? And how well does Polri manage its reputation to maintain and enhance public trust in the current digital era?

The aim of this study is to understand the forms and characteristics of disinformation related to Polri on cyberspace social media. Furthermore, this study seeks to explore the reputation management strategies adopted by Polri in responding to digital disinformation in the digital public space and to assess how effective these strategies are in building and maintaining public trust in the Polri institution amidst the uncontrolled flow of information.

Theoretically and practically, this study is intended to provide benefits. Theoretically, this study can make a valuable contribution to the literature on communication studies in the digital era, particularly concerning public institution reputation management. The results of this study can strengthen academic contributions to the literature on how organizations communicate in response to the systematic and structured spread of disinformation on social media. Additionally, the findings from this study provide a basis for analyzing the correlation between public trust and institutional credibility in the context of digital information disruptions in future research.

In terms of its practical benefits, the results of this study are expected to serve as strategic input for the Polri institution, especially in the formulation and implementation of more effective and adaptive police

.

reputation management policies in response to the dynamics of hoaxes. The research findings will also be useful for the Polri Public Relations Division in evaluating public communication handling and enhancing internal digital literacy. Furthermore, the findings from this study may attract the interest of other government institutions and members of the communication and public professions in recognizing not only the strengths of information management and trust in this digital era where opinion manipulation occurs.

The scope of this research is designed to be focused and in-depth, meaning that the research range must be limited to maintain the research objectives. This study centers on the Indonesian National Police (Polri), specifically the East Java Regional Police (Polda Jatim), in the unit or section that acts as a strategic function in managing public communication and reputation, overseeing the Public Relations Division of Polda Jatim. Within this framework, the research will consider how communication responses to digital misinformation issues on social media are conceptualized and operationalized.

Meanwhile, the main focus of this study is on Polri's reputation management strategies against digital misinformation produced by anti-government actors. This research will uncover the forms of misinformation that emerge on social media, how Polri and Polda Jatim respond to such misinformation, and the efforts made to shape the institution's digital identity.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection methods including literature review, documentation, and interviews with relevant parties in Polri and experts in digital communication. In other words, this research can be viewed as an ability to provide more directed and in-depth knowledge about Polri's reputation management strategies in the era of digital misinformation, which aligns with more complex issues.

literature review

Concept of Institutional Reputation

The reputation of an institution is a combination of what the public thinks about its credibility, morality, and the organization's ability to fulfill its given mandate. This combination is not a spontaneous formation; rather, it has been built over many years through dialogue with various groups such as communities, media, and interest groups. In the era of increasing digital connectivity, reputation heavily relies on the institution's ability to control communication, especially in public domains such as social media. As stated by the Public Relations Division of the Indonesian National Police (Polri) in their publication "Polri's Communication Strategy for Social Media," an institution's reputation can be restored through transparent, responsive, and participatory communication adaptations.

In practice, entities like Polri typically strive to gain public trust by demonstrating genuine attitudes and addressing controversial issues transparently. Additionally, they aim to design transformations within Polri to support Indonesia's vision for 2045. Although an institution's reputation significantly impacts bureaucratic reform, transforming the institution to be more effective, accountable, and humanistic in public service will greatly enhance Polri's legitimacy and image in society.

From a crisis communication perspective, the role of preparedness and rapid response to situations that could potentially damage reputation is emphasized by Coombs (2022) in his book "Sustaining Crisis Communication." An organization can protect its institutional reputation during a crisis through the distribution of accurate messages, a willingness to acknowledge mistakes when necessary, and maintaining consistency in messaging throughout the crisis (Coombs). On the other hand, the book "The Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Opinion" (Amir et al.) indicates that social media has surged to become the most powerful ecosystem in shaping public opinion. The fragility of reputation: An institution's reputation in this protective context becomes highly vulnerable to narratives that spread virally, regardless of whether those narratives are based on facts or misinformation.

Institutional Reputation Management Strategies

The reputation management strategy of an organization consists of a series of planned actions aimed at building, maintaining, and regaining a positive impression of an entity in the eyes of the public. Within institutional boundaries, in this case, the Indonesian National Police, particularly the East Java Regional Police, reputation is not only a symbol of public trust but also one of the social capitals that determine the effectiveness of public service functions. Proactive and directed communication, as suggested in the police communication strategy for social media, emphasizes the importance of planned communication that is not only reactive but also proactive. This approach involves not only reporting factual information but also crafting narratives that uphold the organization's reputation and maintain direct contact through social media. The goal is to create favorable public opinion and avoid a decline in public perception. Moreover, the Public Relations Division of Polda Jawa Timur is striving for institutional reform as a foundation for reputation. Reputation and internal

.
governance are two sides of the same coin in any organization, and the police are no exception, as outlined in the Design for Polri Transformation to Support Indonesia's Vision for 2045. Institutional efforts toward transparency, professionalism, and positive responses to community demands are long-term strategies to strengthen legitimacy and public trust. Structured crisis management is also necessary. From a crisis communication perspective, as expressed by Coombs (2022) in "Ongoing Crisis Communication," reputation management needs to be conducted before a crisis—rather than during a crisis. Organizations must have crisis communication mechanisms that not only detect issues early but also respond quickly and adjust their messages appropriately. If the response is slow or inaccurate, public perception may deteriorate.

Previous Research

Recent scholarly works consistently argue that digital disinformation poses a serious strategic threat to public institutions, including security services such as the Indonesian National Police (POLRI), in protecting public perception and trust. Nurdin (2024) has detailed how the dissemination of false information by anonymous sources or troll social media accounts is used by anti-government actors to undermine the legitimacy of state institutions. This type of disinformation often involves narratives intended to guide the public towards a negative perception of the neutrality and honesty of the police, especially in the lead-up to political events such as elections. As a result, Widiastuti and Riyanto (2022) emphasize the importance of adaptive crisis communication through digital media as a strategy for maintaining and restoring public trust in institutions. They conclude that the effectiveness of the communication strategies adopted by state institutions to counter public opinion attacks heavily relies on the speed of clarification, message consistency, and openness in addressing emerging issues in real-time on social media platforms. This perspective is supported by findings reported by Siregar (2021), which suggest that the reputation of public institutions is significantly determined by how those institutions respond to criticism and emerging crises in society. Similarly, POLRI and other institutions are recommended to create a permanent digital narrative monitoring system that can be utilized to anticipate disinformation. McQuade (2024), in his book "Attack from Within," demonstrates that disinformation is not merely a communication reality but a weapon of socio-political sabotage against democratic governance instruments at global, national, and local levels. Actions to enhance reputation, he argues, must involve education and collaboration with the digital community at large to build resilience against information control.

Conceptual Framework

This study develops a model to understand how digital disinformation campaigns by anti-government groups on social media have emerged, several years after the initial appearance of this issue. This phenomenon has led to a decline in public trust in state institutions, including the Indonesian National Police (POLRI). Organized distortions and mass manipulation of information will alter public perceptions and undermine the image and legitimacy of the police. Consequently, both POLRI's authority and public trust are at risk. The dual impact of lost trust and pressure on the organization demands the development and implementation of responsive reputation management strategies through transparent public communication. This approach involves various activities, including counter-narrative campaigns, sensitive issue management, active use of official social media, and collaboration with third parties (ranging from media to academics to community leaders). By following these steps, it is hoped that POLRI will be able to improve its position in an environment characterized by "information anarchy" and rebuild its reputation management strategies to reassure a previously hurt public.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. This method is chosen because it can reveal the meanings and strategies employed by the Indonesian National Police (Polri) in addressing digital disinformation in depth, prioritizing understanding based on the context of social realities as reflected in digital media, rather than merely looking at numbers/figures/statistics.
The research is conducted within the working environment of the East Java Regional Police (Polda Jatim), specifically in the Public Relations Division, which handles information systems and strategic operations to build the organization's service image. The subjects of this research are members of the Public Relations Division of Polda Jatim responsible for overseeing digital communication and internal social media observers of Polri. Data collection is carried out through in-depth interviews to obtain comprehensive information from parties directly involved in public relations and police reputation management as custodians of Polri's image, who are actively engaged in the public relations environment of Polda Jatim. This method also allows the researcher to examine the experiences, tactics, and perspectives of the informants directly and contextually.

.
My informants include members of the Public Relations Division of Polda Jatim who are responsible for developing strategies and executing digital communication, internal social media observers of Polri who monitor and analyze content in cyberspace, and digital observers.

Research Results And Discussion

Forms and Characteristics of Digital Disinformation Against Polri

According to the data, the disinformation targeted at Polri consists of delegitimization narratives, event-based hoaxes, and manipulated visual and audio materials. This misinformation is often disseminated by anonymous profiles, troll groups, or certain entities perceived as anti-government.

In interviews, several findings were reported by the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police (Polda Jatim) that not only react to issues but also implement preventive communication strategies. This is achieved through:

1. Periodically scheduling educational materials and positive narrative campaigns such as media literacy.
2. Sharing success stories of Polri within the community.
3. Providing testimonies from crime victims assisted by the police.

The Public Relations Division of Polda Jatim also utilizes analytical tools to monitor negative narrative trends in real-time. This enables a rapid response before issues escalate. They also rely on digital intelligence dashboards to visualize the spread of key accounts and their connections. Some of the biggest obstacles include the limited number of personnel dedicated solely to digital media. Additionally, the complexity of algorithms on platforms like TikTok allows misinformation to spread very quickly. A second issue is the lack of public engagement similar to a Babel-flock, which verifies information before it is shared further.In recent months, Polri has faced various negative stories and unpleasant narratives that could damage the institution's image. The following information includes a summary of trends, channels from which these issues originate, potential impacts, and responses to address them.

Table 1 Monitoring Data on Negative Issues and Disinformation on Social Media

No	Date	Negative Issue / Narrative	Platform	Potential Impact	Response Action
1	January 14, 2025	Narrative that Polri is criminalizing human rights activists in Surabaya	Twitter (X), TikTok	Moderate–High	Official clarification on Twitter and press release
2	January 27, 2025	Allegation that Polri is silencing alternative media through legal pressure	Instagram, YouTube	High	Open correction and explanation of legal procedures
3	February 6, 2025	Disinformation regarding "Polri collaborating with buzzers to attack the opposition"	Facebook, Telegram	High	Monitoring of spreading accounts and coordination with the Ministry of Communication and Information
4	March 21, 2025	Edited video of an arrest misrepresented to show Polri as repressive during student protests	TikTok, Twitter	High	Uploading the full video as clarification
5	April 5, 2025	Issue of "electronic fines as a new extortion tool"	Facebook, Twitter	Moderate	Public education through infographics and press release

.
Source: Digital Media Monitoring Subdivision – Public Relations Division of Polda Jatim

Table 1 Explanation
On January 14, 2025, a story circulated claiming that the police were criminalizing human rights activists in Surabaya. This issue was observed on Twitter and TikTok, with an impact believed to range from moderate to high. The expected response is an official clarification to convey their perspective on the matter through Twitter and a press release.

On January 27, 2025, it was reported that the police silenced alternative media through legal pressure on Instagram and YouTube, with a low influence. To address this issue, a clear clarification will be provided, explaining the relevant legal processes.

Then, on February 6, 2025, disinformation emerged claiming that authorities were collaborating with "buzzers" to attack the opposition, appearing on Facebook and Telegram. The stakes of this narrative are also high. What can/should be done is to monitor and coordinate with the Ministry of Communication and Information, as well as with accounts spreading false information. In addition to monitoring the accounts disseminating misinformation, collaboration with the Ministry of Communication and Information is necessary to address the spread of disinformation abuse.

On March 21, 2025, an edited video depicting what was claimed to be a police arrest during student protests went viral on TikTok and Twitter. Given the potential significant consequences, the police plan to upload the full video as a form of clarification to accurately inform the public about what transpired.

On April 5, 2025, a meme titled "electronic fines as a new extortion tool" was posted on Facebook and Twitter, with a potential moderate impact. To address these concerns, the police will conduct public education through informational graphics and press releases to share the benefits and usage of the electronic ticketing system.

These issues highlight the challenges faced by the police in managing their image and public trust. A quick and open response is essential to counter such negative narratives. This will educate and establish an accurate record through explanations, helping the public put disinformation into perspective and increasing awareness of the police's role and functions in maintaining law enforcement.

The thematic analysis focusing on 72 negative contents during the period from January to April 2025 shows several narrative trends as follows:

Table 2 Analysis of Disinformation Narratives

Main Narrative	Percentage of Occurrence (%)	Form of Disinformation
Polri is not politically neutral	28%	Manipulated quotes, edited videos
Polri is repressive towards the common people	23%	Hoax videos, anonymous testimonials
Polri collaborates with government elites	19%	Conspiracy theories, satirical content
Polri is anti-criticism and anti-democracy	17%	Long threads without evidence, memes
Polri uses buzzers and trolls	13%	Fact obfuscation, mass labeling

Source: Digital Media Monitoring Subdivision – Public Relations Division of Polda Jatim

Table 2 Explanation
The percentage figures in the above Table 2 represent the proportion of negative sentiment towards the police during the previous period, including various types of high-intensity disinformation about the police. The table shows the ratio of how many times negative stories that could damage the image of the police institution have emerged. Several narratives can be formed from the table, which clearly indicate that the perpetrators in the media attempting to undermine the police institution include:
1. "Police Favoring Politics" (28%): This narrative tends to be broader, encompassing selected quotes and misleadingly edited videos of individuals behaving poorly. It is an attempt to portray the police as a biased organization—a tactic that can result in the erosion of public trust.
2. "Police Suppression of the Poor" (23%): Through fake videos and disguised witnesses, this narrative seeks to depict police work as akin to the Wild West, where units can act as they please in exercising power over communities, particularly the less fortunate. This can exacerbate tensions between officers and the communities they serve.

.

3. "Police Involvement with Government Elites" (19%): This conspiracy theory appears distinctively alone but can be used to spread narratives. This story is promoted through humorous content that also degrades the police as being neutral and, worse, corrupt or involved in nefarious activities.
4. "Police Reject Criticism and Democracy" (17%): In this instance, long threads without evidence and even memes are posted to support the idea that the police suppress criticism. This creates a negative impression and has implications for public trust in the institution.
5. "Police Use Buzzers and Trolls" (13%): This includes mass labeling and fact obfuscation. When the arena is filled with words and phrases like "buzzers" and "trolls," it portrays the police as a faceless entity that is vulnerable to manipulation.

Reputation Management Strategies of Polri

The strategic actions that have been taken to address the spread of misinformation and disinformation include:
1. Open and Rapid Reading: Through the official Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok accounts @humas_poldajatim.
2. Positive Narrative Infographics: Procedural videos and testimonials for public education.
3. Integrated Monitoring: Utilizing analytical software to identify the spread and impact of issues.
4. Coordination with the Public Relations Division of the National Police Headquarters and the Ministry of Communication and Information regarding accounts spreading hoaxes.
5. Soft Campaigns: Engaging with on-campus and student community interactions to counter hoaxes.

Theoretical Discussion

Based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), organizations experiencing reputational crises due to information attacks need to choose the type of message while considering the type of crisis and public perception (Coombs, 2007). Coombs categorizes response strategies into three: deny, diminish, and rebuild. The strategies implemented by the Public Relations Office of the East Java Regional Police are a combination of "diminish" and "rebuild" strategies:
1. **Diminish**: By clarifying the facts and asserting that the allegations are unfounded and not in accordance with legal procedures.
2. **Rebuild**: By highlighting police efficiency, fostering a sense of community through positive stories, and reinforcing narratives surrounding trust.
This evidence shows that SCCT can be applied in contexts such as state institutions, particularly police institutions.

Conclusion
Conclusion

This study concludes that:
1. Digital disinformation targeting the police consists of delegitimization narratives, visual hoaxes, and provocative content that incites reactions.
2. Digital strategies, collaborative steps, and educational initiatives in police reputation management are essential. The misuse of social media by the public, if left unchecked, threatens to exacerbate the negative impact on the police's image in social media. This approach has proven to be quite effective but needs further development in terms of collaboration and digital competencies.
3. The application of SCCT (Situational Crisis Communication Theory) in crisis management within government organizations like the police is not a new concept.

Recommendations
1. **To the Polri**: Establish long-term partnerships or collaborations with academics, media, influencers, and digital literacy communities to build resilience against misinformation, which is crucial. Implement SCCT in public sector crisis management.
2. **To the Government**: Develop progressive and protective policies for public institutions against systemic digital attacks.
3. **For Future Research**: Due to time and resource limitations, this study focused on a single institution, but similar research can be conducted on other state institutions to gain a richer perspective on how institutional communication approaches strategies in the era of misinformation.

REFERENCES
Amir, A. S., et al. (2023). The Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Opinion. Jakarta: Digital Literacy Press.
Brill, S. (2024). The Death of Truth. New York: Simon & Schuster.

.

Coombs, W. T. (2022). Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding. London: SAGE.

Public Relations Division of Polri. (2023). Polri's Communication Strategy on Social Media. Jakarta: National Police Headquarters.

McQuade, B. (2024). Attack from Within: How Disinformation Threatens Democracy. Washington, DC: National Press.

Nurdin, A. (2024). Political Disinformation and Threats to Digital Democracy. Yogyakarta: Gama Press.

Siregar, R. (2021). Crisis Communication Strategies in Public Institutions. Jakarta: Komunika.

Suhendra, R., & Pratiwi, L. (2024). Social Media in the 2024 Political Campaign. Surabaya: Democracy Institute.

Wardah, N. (2024). Social Media and Young Voter Behavior. Makassar: Election Literacy.

Widiastuti, S. & Riyanto, T. (2022). Public Communication in Information Crises. Bandung: Remaja Rosda Karya.

Authors' Bibliography

Wahyu Agung Nusantoro, Born in Kediri, April 22, 1995. My last education was at Senior High School 2 Probolinggo City, graduating in 2013. In 2016, I graduated from the Police Non-Commissioned Officer education program and is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree at Open University. My main research interests are reputation management and public communication.