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Crisis Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs (Komdigi) in Handling Cases of Internal Staff Involvement in Online Gambling Site Licensing

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the crisis communication strategy implemented by the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs (Komdigi) in handling cases of internal staff involvement in online gambling site licensing, which was revealed in October 2024. The research employed a qualitative method with a case study design. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with five informants from three work units directly involved in crisis management, namely the Public Relations Bureau, Legal Bureau, and Directorate of Public Communication, as well as documentation analysis including press releases, official social media posts, and internal regulations. The findings indicate that Komdigi implemented a top-down communication model with the Minister as the primary spokesperson. Based on SCCT analysis, this crisis falls within the preventable cluster, which was responded to with a rebuild strategy through four main narratives: support for legal proceedings, employee suspension, integrity pact signing, and issuance of Ministerial Instruction Number 2 of 2024. Based on IRT analysis, the dominant strategy employed was corrective action through corrective and preventive measures, supported by bolstering and transcendence strategies. A consistent non-defensive stance became the primary characteristic of Komdigi's response. These findings confirm the importance of established organizational communication infrastructure, response speed, and consistency between narrative and action in government institution crisis communication management.

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Introduction

The search conducted by the Jakarta Metropolitan Police at the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs (Komdigi), beginning on October 31, 2024, attracted significant public attention in Indonesia. The investigation revealed the involvement of 16 internal employees among 24 suspects who allegedly abused their authority to manipulate the blocking of online gambling websites. This created a strong institutional paradox, as an agency mandated to combat online gambling was implicated through the actions of its own personnel. The situation triggered concerns about public trust in digital bureaucracy and challenged the government's crisis communication capacity. From an organizational communication perspective, such crises threaten not only external reputation but also internal cohesion and morale (Seeger & Sellnow, 2021: 45). The transformation of the Ministry of Communication and Informatics into Komdigi in October 2024 was intended to strengthen digital governance in Indonesia. The institution was positioned as a leading agency in combating online gambling and illegal lending while strengthening national digital infrastructure. However, the involvement of internal personnel in practices contrary to its mandate created challenges to internal oversight and government legitimacy.

Online gambling is not merely a criminal or social problem but also a complex public communication issue. Its eradication requires interagency coordination, public education, and effective management of public expectations. The issue also illustrates the increasingly complex relationship between the state and society in the digital sphere, particularly when state officials are involved in activities they are mandated to prevent. The rise of social media has further complicated government crisis communication. Information can spread rapidly, while the public is no longer a passive recipient of official information but also actively produces narratives and shapes collective perceptions. Government institutions face greater accountability and transparency demands than private organizations because their authority derives from public mandates. Consequently, internal violations may create not only reputational risks but also institutional delegitimization.

The scale of online gambling in Indonesia reinforces the urgency of the issue. PPATK reported that online gambling involvement includes children under 10 years old (2.02%), those aged 10–20 years (10.97%), and those aged 21–30 years (12.82%). Academic studies indicate that online gambling can contribute to social relationship problems, anxiety, depression, and other multidimensional consequences (Saria et al., 2024). Widhiatanti and Tobing (2024) identified financial, social, psychological, personality, health, academic, and religious impacts on adolescents. Meanwhile, APJII (2022) reported internet penetration of 99.16% among those aged 13–18 years, increasing their potential exposure to online gambling. The Ministry of Communication and Informatics (2023) also reported blocking more than 124,000 online gambling contents. Internationally, Casu et al. (2023) identified online gambling as an emerging addictive behavior associated with mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

This study distinguishes between social crisis and communication crisis. The social crisis refers to online gambling as a multidimensional social problem, while the communication crisis examined in this study concerns the loss of institutional credibility resulting from the involvement of internal officials in activities contrary to Komdigi's mandate. Therefore, this research does not examine gambling behavior or the technical effectiveness of website blocking but focuses on how Komdigi communicates the crisis, manages reputation recovery, and aligns its communication response with public perceptions of institutional responsibility. The involvement of Komdigi personnel also raises issues of public trust and institutional legitimacy. Public trust depends on consistency between policy statements and bureaucratic actions. When officials act contrary to institutional mandates, the legitimacy of the institution may be questioned. Because the crisis can be categorized as *preventable*, involving actions

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that could have been prevented or resulted from serious misconduct, *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (SCCT) suggests that organizations facing high responsibility attribution require accommodative responses, including acknowledgment and corrective action.

To analyze this crisis, the study employs three complementary perspectives. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by Coombs provides a framework for identifying crisis types and appropriate communication strategies. Image Restoration Theory (IRT) developed by Benoit helps identify concrete image-repair strategies reflected in public communication. Meanwhile, organizational communication provides a foundation for understanding how crisis messages are internally produced, coordinated, and distributed. The integration of these approaches enables a more comprehensive analysis of Komdigi's crisis communication. Previous studies demonstrate that government communication crises have occurred in various Indonesian contexts. The Ministry of Agriculture experienced a communication crisis related to the PT IBU case (Putri et al., 2019), while Sulistyanto et al. (2020) identified bureaucratic hierarchy and centralized decision-making as obstacles to rapid crisis responses within the Ministry of Transportation. Andarini et al. (2023) examined image restoration strategies used by Indonesian government officials in responding to public criticism related to COVID-19. Studies of local governments in Pekanbaru and Blora also demonstrate the importance of adaptive communication strategies during public crises.

IRT has also been applied to Indonesian public institutions. Widyastuti and Ekoputro (2023) examined local government image restoration, while Muhammad and Purwatiningsih (2025) analyzed crisis communication in a state-owned enterprise. Internationally, Wiese and Van der Westhuizen (2023) found that government crisis communication often remains top-down, while Corazza et al. (2020) demonstrated the application of IRT in the Costa Concordia crisis. A comparable institutional paradox occurred at the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) when former KPK Chairman Firli Bahuri was named a suspect in an alleged extortion case involving former Minister of Agriculture Syahrul Yasin Limpo in November 2023. Similar to the Komdigi case, the institution faced a contradiction between its enforcement mandate and the alleged actions of an internal official. Indikator Politik Indonesia reported that public trust in the KPK declined from 84% in 2018 to 65% in 2024 (Djajaatmadja, 2024). Hidayati and Purworini (2025), using SCCT to analyze 50 online news articles, found that *justification* was the dominant strategy at 76%, while *attack the accuser*, *denial*, and *scapegoating* each accounted for 2%. Similar patterns were identified in research on the Ministry of Finance crisis involving tax officials (Aji & Purworini, 2024).

Nevertheless, Hidayati and Purworini (2025) acknowledged limitations, including reliance solely on online media, the absence of IRT and organizational communication perspectives, and limited insight into internal institutional dynamics. Moreover, most SCCT research originates from Western contexts, making contextual adaptation important when applying the theory to Indonesia's hierarchical bureaucracy, power relations, and fluctuating public trust. The literature therefore indicates several research gaps. First, limited research specifically examines government communication crises related to online gambling in Indonesia. Second, research on institutional mandate violations remains largely based on media content analysis rather than qualitative approaches involving direct institutional access. Third, few studies integrate SCCT and IRT in the context of Indonesian public bureaucracy. Fourth, research connecting crisis communication strategies with internal organizational communication dynamics remains limited.

These gaps are significant because crises arising from internal misconduct differ from external or accidental crises. Within SCCT, such cases fall within the *preventable cluster*, characterized by high responsibility attribution and requiring different communication strategies from *victim* or *accidental*

crises. The limited evidence base may leave government communication practitioners without adequate guidance for managing similar crises. Therefore, this study addresses the research gap by analyzing Komdigi's crisis communication strategy through organizational communication, Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), and Image Restoration Theory (IRT). Organizational communication serves as the infrastructural foundation for understanding internal message management, while SCCT identifies the crisis cluster and level of responsibility attribution, and IRT analyzes concrete image-restoration strategies reflected in public communication.

Methods

The object of this study is Komdigi's crisis communication strategy in addressing the involvement of internal officials in online gambling website licensing. The study focuses on key messages, communication channels, spokespersons, release consistency, and institutional image restoration. A qualitative case study is employed to provide an in-depth understanding of actors, processes, and communication dynamics (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). The case is bounded by the 2024–2025 period, Komdigi's public communication context, and communication artifacts such as official statements, press releases, social media content, and interviews. Crisis communication strategy is understood as organizational efforts to manage threats to reputation and legitimacy (Coombs, 2007; 2015), while *image restoration* refers to efforts to restore public perceptions (Benoit, 1995).

The subjects are Komdigi informants with relevant knowledge of crisis communication planning, implementation, and evaluation. Informants are selected through purposive sampling, with possible *snowball sampling*. They include public relations officials, communication staff, and relevant legal or internal oversight personnel. The number of informants follows data saturation (Creswell, 2014). The study is conducted at Komdigi, Jakarta, because the institution is directly related to the case. Data collection is planned for November 2024–January 2026, including interviews, non-participant observation, and document collection. The timeframe follows the principle of *case-boundedness* (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). The study uses descriptive-interpretive qualitative data consisting of primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained through in-depth interviews and non-participant observation (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). Secondary data include press releases, official statements, social media posts, press conference transcripts, online news, and policy documents (Bowen, 2009). Both sources are combined to strengthen contextual understanding and data credibility through cross-checking (Yin, 2018).

The research is conducted in three stages. The pre-field stage involves determining the research focus, reviewing relevant literature, preparing research instruments, and arranging access to research sites and participants for interviews. The fieldwork stage consists of conducting interviews, carrying out observations, and collecting relevant documents to obtain comprehensive data. The post-field stage involves transcribing and organizing the collected data, analyzing the findings, integrating information from multiple sources, and preparing the research report. Data analysis follows the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which comprises data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Semi-structured in-depth interviews explore Komdigi's crisis communication planning, implementation, and evaluation, including messages, spokespersons, and responses to public and media opinion (Patton, 2015). Interviews are recorded with consent and conducted until data saturation is reached (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Non-participant observation examines Komdigi's public communication through official websites, social media, press conferences, and interactions with media and stakeholders (Angrosino, 2007). The literature review provides the theoretical foundation using SCCT by Coombs (2007; 2015)

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and Image Restoration Theory by Benoit (1995), while also identifying research gaps and supporting interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Documents such as official statements, press releases, social media posts, online news, press conference transcripts, and policies are analyzed to trace organizational communication and verify interview and observation findings (Bowen, 2009). Documentation supports triangulation and strengthens research credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results and Discussions

1. Crisis Communication Mechanism

Komdigi's crisis communication involved a coordinated organizational structure with clearly divided roles among units, including spokesperson functions, internal communication, inter-unit coordination, and coordination with external institutions.

a. Minister as the Main Spokesperson

Minister of Communication and Digital Affairs Meutya Hafid served as the main spokesperson because of the seriousness of the case and the need for top-level institutional legitimacy. As explained by an informant: *"Bu Menterinya sendiri yang berperan sebagai juru bicara langsung. Kalau di struktur memang ada jubir tapi karena ini kasusnya cukup besar makanya langsung diambil alih oleh Bu Menteri." (N2).* Her first official statement was issued on October 31, 2024, the same day the case became public. The rapid response was considered important to prevent uncontrolled media narratives (N4). The Minister also communicated directly with journalists at the Merdeka Palace on November 1, 2024. Thus, direct leadership involvement and rapid response became important elements in maintaining communication credibility.

b. Top-Down Communication Model

Komdigi applied a top-down communication model, in which the main narrative was formulated at the leadership level and delivered to implementing units. One or two designated personnel acted as liaisons between the Minister and the Public Relations Bureau (N2). This mechanism enabled message control and consistency across communication channels. The centralized approach reflected the Minister's cautious communication style, particularly regarding sensitive issues. The Public Relations Bureau and Public Communication Directorate primarily functioned as executors and distributors of leadership-approved messages.

c. Internal Inter-Unit Coordination

Crisis communication involved three key units: the Public Relations Bureau, Legal Bureau, and Public Communication Directorate. The Public Relations Bureau managed media relations and press releases, the Legal Bureau verified legal aspects and coordinated with investigators, while the Public Communication Directorate managed official digital channels (N1; N3). The units coordinated to ensure consistency between social media content and official press releases: *"Kami juga berkoordinasi untuk memastikan pesan yang disampaikan di media sosial konsisten dengan siaran pers yang dikeluarkan Biro Humas. Tidak boleh ada kontradiksi."* (N5)

d. External Coordination

Komdigi, as the Daily Chair of the Online Gambling Eradication Task Force under Presidential Decree No. 21 of 2024, coordinated with institutions including the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, the Police, OJK, and PPATK (N1). Coordination with PPATK was also used to communicate reductions in online gambling transactions. Established interinstitutional networks were considered important resources in crisis management.

2. Response Strategy and Main Narratives

Komdigi responded rapidly and systematically, beginning with an official statement on the same day the case emerged.

a. Rapid Response

The Minister issued five key points on October 31, 2024, through the official Instagram account @kemkomdigi. This reflects the "golden hour" principle in crisis communication, which emphasizes the importance of responding quickly before external actors shape the narrative (Fearn-Banks, 2011: 26). In the digital environment, rapid response is increasingly important because social media accelerates the news cycle (Valenzuela & Halpin, 2022). Similar findings were reported by Cintia et al. (2024) in the PT KAI Daop 2 Bandung crisis. The main communication timeline was:

Table 1. Chronology of the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs (Komdigi)'s Official Responses to the Online Gambling Scandal (31 October–12 November 2024)

Date	Komdigi Response
31 October 2024	Minister's five-point official statement and first Instagram post
1 November 2024	Minister's media statement at Merdeka Palace and Ministerial Instruction No. 2/2024
4 November 2024	Announcement of the suspension of 11 employees and ministerial coordination meeting
6 November 2024	Publication of the President's direction on combating online gambling
9 November 2024	"Perangi Judi Online! Tidak Ada Kongkalikong dan Beking" campaign
12 November 2024	Minister's community visit and public apology

Source: Processed from @kemkomdigi documentation and mass media reports, 2026.

b. Four Main Narratives

Komdigi consistently communicated four main narratives in response to the online gambling scandal: supporting law enforcement efforts by the Jakarta Metropolitan Police, suspending employees suspected of involvement as an immediate corrective measure, strengthening internal integrity through integrity pacts, and issuing Ministerial Instruction No. 2/2024 as a formal basis for institutional reform. These narratives emphasized law enforcement cooperation, corrective action, internal prevention, and institutional accountability (N2). In addition, the President's directive that there should be "no collusion and no backing" was publicly disseminated through Komdigi's social media channels to reinforce the government's commitment to combating online gambling. Presidential Decree No. 21 of 2024 further provided an institutional framework for interagency coordination in addressing online gambling (N2; N3).

c. Non-Defensive Communication

Komdigi deliberately adopted a non-defensive communication posture, avoiding denial, blame-shifting, or attempts to minimize the involvement of internal officials. Instead, the institution expressed support for the legal process and implemented internal corrective measures (N2). This approach reflected the institution's awareness of the paradox between its mandate to combat online gambling and the involvement of its own personnel. Given high public expectations, the institution considered a firm and unambiguous response necessary (N4).

d. Public Apology

On November 12, 2024, Minister Meutya Hafid apologized directly to communities affected by online gambling during a visit to Semper Barat, North Jakarta. The apology was accompanied by an acknowledgment of institutional shortcomings and a commitment to internal improvement. "Saya juga minta maaf Bapak, Ibu, bahwa dari kantor kami kemudian ada yang terlibat. Sedihnya luar biasa." (Meutya Hafid, November 12, 2024, as cited in mass media reports). The apology differed from previous official statements because it was delivered directly to affected communities and combined apology, empathy, acknowledgment of institutional weaknesses, and corrective commitment.

e. Communication Channels

Komdigi used multiple communication channels, with social media and press releases as the main platforms. Instagram @kemkomdigi enabled direct communication with the public, while press releases supported media dissemination (N4). This approach is consistent with the growing use of social media in government crisis communication (Goeritman, 2021) and similar practices by the Directorate General of Taxes (Anagusti et al., 2024). Komdigi also regularly published blocking data to demonstrate accountability and respond to criticism with evidence and concrete actions (N2; N4). Public education was positioned as an important long-term strategy because combating online gambling was considered not only a matter of blocking websites but also of improving public awareness. To broaden outreach beyond official channels and address social media echo chambers, Komdigi collaborated with key opinion leaders to develop and disseminate messages (N4). Direct community visits also provided a two-way communication channel that enabled greater empathy and interaction than social media or press releases.

3. Corrective and Preventive Measures

Komdigi implemented corrective and preventive measures to address the case and prevent similar incidents. These measures included employee sanctions, internal regulations, and stronger oversight. As N5 emphasized, the credibility of crisis communication depends on consistency between statements and concrete actions: *"What matters is consistency between what we communicate and actual actions. It is not enough to talk; there must be concrete evidence, such as employee suspension and the issuance of regulations." (N5)*

a. Employee Suspension and Dismissal

The first corrective measure was the suspension of employees suspected of involvement. Eleven employees were initially suspended on November 4, 2024, with the number later increasing to 16 (N2). The employment process was coordinated with the Legal Bureau and the State Civil Service Agency (BKN), and employees proven to be involved were ultimately dismissed through dishonorable termination (PTDH) (N1; N3). Criminal proceedings were conducted separately under Article 27(2) of the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE), concerning the distribution of electronic information containing gambling content (N3). Thus, administrative and criminal sanctions proceeded through their respective legal mechanisms.

b. Ministerial Instruction and Integrity Pact

Komdigi issued Ministerial Instruction No. 2 of 2024 on November 1, 2024, as part of strengthened institutional policies against online gambling (N3). In addition, all employees were required to sign an integrity pact, with dismissal as a potential sanction for violations (N1). These instruments established layered prevention: the Ministerial Instruction provided institutional policy, while the integrity pact strengthened individual accountability.

c. Strengthening the Oversight System

Komdigi also strengthened internal oversight through the Whistleblowing System, accessible via *wbs.komdigi.go.id*, which provides a confidential channel for reporting suspected violations and supports early detection (N5). The Minister also instructed all ministry personnel to cooperate fully with law enforcement and facilitate investigations related to online gambling (Ministerial Statement, October 31, 2024).

d. Summary

Table 2. Corrective and Preventive Measures Implemented by Komdigi in Response to the Online Gambling Scandal

Category	Measure	Description
Corrective	Employee suspension	11 employees initially suspended on November 4, 2024; later increased to 16
Corrective	PTDH	Employees proven to be involved were dismissed following the applicable legal process
Preventive	Ministerial Instruction No. 2/2024	Institutional policy to strengthen online gambling eradication
Preventive	Integrity pact	Signed by employees, with dismissal as a sanction for violations
Preventive	Whistleblowing System	Confidential reporting mechanism for early detection

Source: Processed from interviews and documentation, 2026.

Overall, corrective measures addressed existing violations through suspension, dismissal, and criminal proceedings, while preventive measures focused on institutional regulation, individual accountability, and strengthened oversight.

4. Transition Challenges

The crisis response occurred under challenging institutional conditions, particularly during a leadership transition, without a comparable crisis precedent and with limitations in early-detection mechanisms.

a. Leadership Transition and Crisis Timing

A major challenge was the timing of the case. Minister Meutya Hafid had been inaugurated on October 21, 2024, only ten days before the case emerged through a police operation on October 31, 2024. N1 noted that the Minister had to manage the crisis while still adapting to the organization, while N2 stated that internal consolidation was still underway. Coordination between the new ministerial team and existing units was therefore not yet fully established (N2). The sudden operation also surprised the Legal Bureau, which had not been informed beforehand (N3). Consequently, Komdigi had to formulate its communication response under highly reactive conditions.

b. Absence of Precedent and Limited Early Detection

The case was described as the first crisis of its kind within Komdigi, meaning there was no specific precedent, established crisis protocol, or simulation for dealing with internal involvement in online gambling (N3). Communication decisions were therefore largely developed situationally. Early detection was also limited because Komdigi did not have a dedicated internal monitoring unit. Monitoring relied mainly on collegial oversight and the Whistleblowing System, with the Inspectorate

General playing a role (N2). Although an earlier suspected case had been investigated but not proven, the absence of a dedicated monitoring mechanism limited systematic detection of potential violations.N1 also indicated that cross-institutional coordination in online gambling eradication remained relatively consistent before and after the crisis. This suggests that the crisis did not substantially disrupt interinstitutional operations, although it also raises questions about whether the incident should have prompted stronger monitoring and coordination mechanisms. Overall, the findings indicate that Komdigi's relatively rapid, consistent, and non-defensive crisis response was achieved under constrained institutional conditions. Leadership transition, the absence of a comparable precedent, limited early-detection capacity, and the sudden nature of the operation simultaneously restricted the Ministry's room for maneuver.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Komdigi's crisis communication during the November 2024 online gambling scandal was supported by an organizational communication structure that enabled relatively rapid and consistent responses despite a recent leadership transition. The Minister functioned as the principal spokesperson, the Public Relations Bureau coordinated the dissemination of official information, and designated liaison personnel facilitated communication between the leadership and relevant organizational units. This configuration is consistent with Rogers and Kincaid's (1981) conceptualization of communication networks, in which opinion leaders, gatekeepers, and liaisons perform complementary functions in organizational information exchange. It also supports Pace and Faules' (2010) argument that effective organizational communication depends on the circulation and interpretation of messages across interconnected units. Compared with the hierarchical fragmentation identified in the Ministry of Transportation context by Sulistyanto et al. (2020), Komdigi's communication arrangements enabled the institution to issue an initial official response on October 31, 2024, followed by announcements concerning employee suspensions on November 4, 2024. These findings suggest that established communication mechanisms can help public institutions maintain operational responsiveness during leadership transitions. However, this responsiveness should not be attributed exclusively to centralized leadership, as horizontal coordination among the Public Relations Bureau, Legal Bureau, and Public Communication Directorate also contributed to message consistency. Furthermore, established relationships with the Coordinating Ministry for Political and Security Affairs, the Indonesian National Police, the Financial Services Authority, and the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center supported interagency coordination. Whereas Mahriva (2020) emphasizes formal emergency response arrangements as an element of crisis preparedness, the Komdigi case illustrates how existing organizational structures and interagency networks can provide an operational foundation when a formal crisis management plan is absent. Nevertheless, this finding does not establish that informal coordination is superior to formal preparedness. Instead, it highlights the capacity of established relationships to mitigate coordination difficulties during unexpected crises, while reinforcing the need for formal protocols governing authority, information verification, escalation procedures, and accountability.

From the perspective of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the Komdigi scandal presents a challenging institutional context because the alleged misconduct involved personnel within an organization responsible for combating online gambling. Coombs (2007) identifies preventable crises as situations involving relatively high organizational responsibility, in which reputational damage may intensify when stakeholders perceive failures in organizational control or prevention. The findings indicate that Komdigi did not rely primarily on denial or attempts to minimize the seriousness of the

incident. Instead, its response emphasized cooperation with law enforcement, employee sanctions, preventive institutional measures, and public acknowledgement of the crisis. This approach is consistent with SCCT's recommendation that organizations facing high-responsibility crises prioritize rebuild strategies, including accepting responsibility and implementing corrective action (Coombs, 2007, 2015). The response differs from the approach identified by Aji and Purworini (2024) in their examination of the Ministry of Finance, where justification was prominent. In the Komdigi case, cooperation with law enforcement and corrective measures provided a less defensive response to allegations involving internal personnel. This distinction is significant because crisis communication requires more than persuasive language. Its credibility depends on whether the response corresponds to the perceived severity of the crisis and the degree of organizational responsibility. Ma and Zhan (2020) similarly demonstrate that crisis responses inconsistent with stakeholder perceptions of organizational responsibility can generate unfavorable evaluations. Accordingly, the Komdigi case supports the analytical suitability of a rebuild strategy when the available evidence and institutional circumstances make denial difficult to sustain. The timing of the initial response further reinforces this interpretation. Komdigi issued an official statement on October 31, 2024, the same day the case emerged publicly. Coombs (2015) and Fearn-Banks (2011) emphasize the importance of timely communication in limiting information vacuums and reducing the opportunity for competing interpretations to dominate the crisis narrative. Komdigi's initial response established an official point of reference, while subsequent statements and institutional measures developed the broader narrative of accountability. However, speed alone does not establish communication effectiveness. A rapid response contributes to crisis management only when its claims are accurate, consistent with subsequent actions, and supported by verifiable information. The available findings therefore demonstrate the relevance of response timing and message consistency but do not independently establish the extent to which the initial statement changed public opinion or restored institutional trust.

While SCCT explains the strategic suitability of a rebuild response under conditions of high organizational responsibility, Image Restoration Theory (IRT) provides a more detailed framework for examining how that response was communicated. Benoit (1995, 2015) identifies corrective action, mortification, and strategies for reducing the offensiveness of an act as approaches to addressing reputational threats. The Komdigi case demonstrates the use of these complementary strategies through employee suspensions, the dismissal of personnel found to be involved following the applicable process, Ministerial Instruction No. 2/2024, integrity pacts, and a public apology by the Minister. These measures indicate that the institution combined operational intervention with symbolic communication rather than relying exclusively on statements intended to protect its image. Corrective action constituted the central component of this response. The initial suspension of 11 employees on November 4, 2024, was subsequently reported to have increased to 16, while further disciplinary action was directed at employees whose involvement was established through the applicable process. Preventive measures included Ministerial Instruction No. 2/2024, integrity pacts, and a whistleblowing mechanism. According to Benoit (1995, 2015), corrective action involves addressing the immediate problem and demonstrating efforts to prevent recurrence. The Komdigi findings extend this principle to a public-sector context in which institutional credibility depends on the relationship between enforcement, internal controls, and public communication. Sanctions address established misconduct, whereas institutional reforms seek to reduce the possibility of similar violations in the future. Their credibility, however, depends on implementation and verifiable outcomes rather than the formal issuance of policies alone. This pattern contrasts with the BULOG case discussed by Muhammad and Purwatiningsih (2025), in which denial was combined with corrective action, potentially creating tension

between the defensive message and the announced intervention. It also differs from Ndone's (2024) analysis of the Boeing 737 Max crisis, which highlights the reputational consequences associated with delayed responses, inconsistent communication, and blame shifting. These comparisons suggest that corrective action is more coherent when an organization acknowledges the seriousness of a problem rather than simultaneously attempting to deny its significance. Nevertheless, differences in institutional settings, crisis characteristics, and available evidence mean that these comparisons should be interpreted as theoretical contrasts rather than proof that a particular strategy will produce identical outcomes across organizational contexts.

The Minister's public apology on November 12, 2024, added an interpersonal and symbolic dimension to the institutional response. In IRT, mortification involves acknowledging wrongdoing and expressing regret through an apology (Benoit, 1995, 2015). The apology delivered during a visit to the affected community in Semper Barat situated the message within the context of those directly affected rather than restricting it to a formal government venue. This audience-oriented approach potentially strengthened the communicative significance of the apology by recognizing the social consequences of the crisis. The apology also complemented the institution's corrective measures by linking expressions of regret with commitments to reform. Comparisons with the Nganjuk case examined by Widyastuti and Ekoputro (2023) and the Costa Concordia case discussed by Corazza et al. (2020) illustrate how the presence, absence, and construction of an apology can distinguish different forms of crisis response. However, the existence of a public apology does not independently establish that audiences perceived it as authentic or that institutional trust was restored. Such conclusions require evidence from audience responses, stakeholder interviews, or other measures of public perception. Komdigi also employed bolstering and transcendence as supporting image restoration strategies. Bolstering was reflected in the publication of online gambling blocking data and references to continuing institutional efforts, while collaboration with external institutions provided additional support for the official narrative. Transcendence placed the scandal within the broader national objective of combating online gambling, connecting the crisis response to the institution's public mandate. These strategies can strengthen the context in which corrective measures are interpreted, but they should not displace direct acknowledgement of institutional shortcomings. In the Komdigi case, their analytical relevance derives from their supporting role alongside corrective action and mortification. The combination is more coherent than an approach that emphasizes institutional achievements while leaving the underlying allegations unaddressed.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that Komdigi's crisis communication can be understood through the complementary application of organizational communication theory, SCCT, and IRT. Organizational communication explains the structures and relationships through which information circulated, SCCT clarifies the suitability of the response strategy in relation to crisis responsibility, and IRT examines how institutional accountability was expressed through corrective measures, public apology, and supporting rhetorical strategies. This integration indicates that crisis communication cannot be adequately explained by message content alone. It also depends on the organizational capacity to coordinate information and the consistency between the nature of a crisis and the institution's response. The case is particularly relevant to what may be termed an institutional paradox crisis, in which an organization responsible for preventing a problem is confronted with allegations that its own personnel were involved in that same problem. Such a crisis threatens not only institutional reputation but also the credibility of the organization's public mandate. Komdigi consequently faced the dual challenge of addressing allegations involving internal personnel while maintaining the legitimacy of its anti-online-gambling responsibilities. The findings suggest that its

response sought to manage this tension by distinguishing individual accountability from the institution's broader public mission while introducing corrective and preventive measures. However, this distinction can remain credible only if individual sanctions are accompanied by effective institutional oversight. Public communication cannot substitute for evidence of organizational reform. The findings also qualify interpretations associating centralized government communication with public alienation, such as the concern discussed by Wiese and Van der Westhuizen (2023). In the Komdigi case, centralized messaging coexisted with interunit coordination, interagency collaboration, and direct engagement with affected communities. This suggests that centralization and responsiveness are not necessarily incompatible. Nevertheless, the evidence supports a contextual interpretation rather than a universal conclusion about the superiority of centralized communication. Its effectiveness depends on internal information flows, independent verification, clear decision-making authority, and meaningful engagement with affected stakeholders.

The findings have practical implications for crisis management in public institutions. Government organizations should establish formal crisis communication protocols that define spokesperson authority, verification procedures, coordination responsibilities, and timelines for issuing initial statements. Although established communication networks can facilitate rapid responses, reliance on informal relationships may leave institutions vulnerable when key personnel are unavailable or when a crisis requires extensive interagency coordination. Formal protocols should therefore institutionalize effective practices rather than depend exclusively on individual leadership. Crisis responses must also connect public communication with demonstrable institutional action. Employee sanctions, integrity pacts, internal reporting mechanisms, and ministerial instructions should be accompanied by transparent implementation procedures, appropriate oversight, and periodic compliance assessments. Such arrangements would strengthen the relationship between public statements and the institution's capacity to prevent recurrence, while reducing the risk that crisis communication is interpreted as reputational management without substantive organizational change. Furthermore, institutional recovery should be evaluated through indicators extending beyond the speed and consistency of official messaging. Relevant indicators include the implementation of corrective measures, compliance with internal controls, resolution of substantiated complaints, stakeholder perceptions of accountability, and changes in public trust over time. These indicators would distinguish communication outputs, such as official statements and social media publications, from institutional outcomes, such as improved accountability and restored confidence. Interagency coordination should likewise be supported by reliable information verification and clear responsibility allocation. Cooperation with law enforcement and financial monitoring institutions can strengthen the credibility of official statements, but external collaboration should not obscure the institution's responsibility for internal governance. Sustainable recovery therefore requires alignment between the institution's anti-online-gambling mandate, employee conduct, internal supervision, and publicly communicated commitments.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the study examines a single institutional crisis within a specific political and administrative context. Although the case provides an opportunity to analyze the interaction between organizational communication, crisis response strategy, and image restoration, its findings cannot automatically be generalized to institutions facing different forms of misconduct or operating under different governance arrangements. Comparative studies involving other ministries and public agencies could clarify which communication mechanisms are context-specific and which patterns recur across institutional settings. Second, the analysis primarily examines communication processes and strategies reflected in the available research materials. Consequently, the findings are stronger in identifying communication structures, response

timing, and message content than in establishing effects on public perception. The analysis does not independently demonstrate whether the public apology restored trust, whether stakeholders considered the corrective measures sufficient, or whether the announced reforms reduced the likelihood of future misconduct. Future research could address these questions through stakeholder interviews, audience surveys, media framing analysis, and longitudinal assessments of institutional trust. Third, the interpretation of official statements and institutional actions requires a distinction between announced policies and their implementation. The issuance of a ministerial instruction, the signing of integrity pacts, or the establishment of a reporting mechanism does not necessarily demonstrate consistent implementation or measurable improvements. Subsequent studies should therefore examine implementation records, compliance indicators, and institutional outcomes to determine whether the response translated into sustained organizational reform. These limitations do not negate the study's analytical contribution. Rather, they define the scope of its conclusions and identify opportunities for further empirical investigation. The study contributes an integrated account of government crisis communication by connecting organizational structures, strategic response selection, and image restoration. Its principal contribution is not a claim that Komdigi's response definitively restored public trust, but an explanation of how coordinated communication structures, a non-defensive response to a high-responsibility crisis, and a combination of corrective action and public apology can be examined within a unified theoretical framework. This framework provides a foundation for further comparative research into the relationship between crisis communication, institutional accountability, and public-sector legitimacy.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Komdigi's crisis communication strategy in response to the involvement of internal personnel in online gambling website licensing combined organizational coordination, strategic crisis response, and image restoration. From an organizational communication perspective, the division of roles among the Minister, the Public Relations Bureau, and liaison personnel facilitated rapid coordination and message consistency. Through the lens of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the crisis was characterized by high organizational responsibility, prompting a rebuild strategy centered on accepting responsibility and implementing corrective measures. Image Restoration Theory (IRT) further demonstrates that corrective action constituted the dominant response, supported by mortification, bolstering, and transcendence. The integration of these three perspectives indicates that government crisis communication depends on effective organizational structures, appropriate response strategies, and consistency between public messages and institutional actions. However, communication effectiveness alone does not establish the restoration of public trust or resolve underlying institutional weaknesses.

Future research should examine comparable crises across government institutions and incorporate stakeholder interviews, public opinion surveys, and longitudinal analysis to assess how crisis responses influence institutional legitimacy and public trust over time. For practitioners, government institutions should establish formal crisis communication protocols, strengthen internal oversight, ensure transparent implementation of corrective measures, and evaluate the outcomes of institutional reforms rather than relying solely on communication outputs. At the policy level, ministries should integrate crisis communication procedures with accountability mechanisms, employee integrity systems, and independent monitoring to reduce the risk of recurring misconduct. These measures would help ensure that crisis communication functions not merely as a short-term reputational response but as part of a sustained institutional reform process.

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