

The Importance Role of Employees in Responding Crisis Communication

Yuliani Dewi Risanti, Kismiyati El Karimah and
Masayu Nurhayati

Abstract--- Past research shows that reputation and image is very important to the continuity and sustainability of the organizations. Recently, it can be easily damaged by the uncontrolled message circulation that spread on social media. Consumers tend to mislead by untrusted source of information causing losing their trust and give immediate impact to sales decline. One of the vulnerable company that regularly facing this situation is food and beverage industry. Garudafood that known for their peanuts products as the object of this case study has to deal with the negative issues about their company which spread on social media that goes viral within second causing crisis. In order to tackle the issues, commonly organizations held press conference and carefully appointed who will be the spokesperson to talk to mass media and wishing media will spread clarification messages correctly. As crisis become a more frequent occurrence, Garudafood applied different approach in handling the situation. This study aims to examine the importance role of employee as internal stakeholders of the company in responding negative issues that can lead to crisis. In how crisis communications plan is done by utilizing employees as source of information to external stakeholders in particular customers. Data collections through depth interview with the representative of corporate communications and relations of the company supported by literature and previous research. Results shows employees are able to be an essential role in responding crisis communications since they can be as source of information on behalf of the company to their relatives, friends and communities. However, their credibility is being considered since they have interest therefore tend to defend their workplace. After all, the company should release official clarification message that supported with the statement of related parties to increase the credibility of the message and source of information.

Keywords--- Crisis Communication, Employees' Role, Social Media, Crisis Event, Communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

On August 2014, some product from Garudafood were exposed for using harm ingredients which is food additive in their products. The negative tone messages were shared more than 10.000 times within 24 hours on Facebook, the biggest social media platform in Indonesia. As one of the top food and beverage company that famous for its brand 'Kacang Garuda' products received serious criticism: a large proportion of the public shared and forwarded the crisis information on social media and it was recurring in March 2018 where the message was shared on Whatsapp group as one of the largest chat platforms in Indonesia. Additionally, food and beverages issues have always been at the forefront of topics searched. Food-related scandals reported in the news frequently spark heated discussion in social media outlets (Zhu, Anagondhahalli, & Zhang, 2017).

Yuliani Dewi Risanti, Department of Communication Management, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia.
Kismiyati El Karimah, Department of Communication Management, Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia.
Masayu Nurhayati, Department of Dental Nursing, Health Polytechnic Ministry of Health, Palembang, Indonesia.

This kind of situation could occur because consumers' perception that it would pose serious potential risk to their health. Consequently, there are negative response from customer to Garudafoods' products and causing sales plummeted during that event.

The existence of social media and chat platform has transformed how information is generated and shared. People like to connect with their relatives, friends, or specialist groups through the internet. In the digital era, negative news is no longer monopolized by dominating mass media outlets; instead they can spread among social networks and reach large audiences almost instantaneously. In addition, social media sites provide a virtual space for people to bond across geographic boundaries and share information after devastating events, which satisfies people's emotional needs in a crisis (Stephens & Malone, 2009). In many cases, people like to use social media to share and acquire information in the first place. Therefore, crisis communication experts suggest that company should closely monitored message circulation about their company and pay close attention to virtual communities that discussing their products emerging via social media. However new media technologies have also made organizations' crisis management even more complicated because audience add unpredictability and complexity to the issue due to actively participate in virtual discussion (Lin, Liu, Austin, 2014). People share any information through social media without knowing the fact and source of information (Husain, et al, 2014). Garudafood is one of the food and beverage company that are able to survive from product-harm issues. Crisis communication has potential in creating broad and profoundly negative effects for firms in crisis, in addition also challenges firms' ability to recover from a crisis (Zheng, Liu, & Davison, 2018).

Effective crisis communication plan is important for the successful resolution of company crisis therefore the company should have planned strategy in advance and manage successfully, since from the beginning of the crisis until at the end of the crisis because every cycle can be influenced and can be recurring in the future. (Kadarova, Mihalcova, Kadar, & Vida, 2014).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication is an essential part of managerial function. The managers can affect the individuals and groups, internal and external stakeholders through effective communication so that the organization can achieve its performance targets. Long-term success in communication requires commitment from the upper level managerial to openly communicate with all stakeholders especially in the event of crisis. A crisis is generally considered as and unpredictable event that can potentially generate negative outcomes and may threaten corporate reputation (Coombs, 2007). Companies need to effectively communicate with the stakeholders about crisis to protect themselves from reputational decline. Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) outlined by (Coombs, 2007) provides a framework for understanding and choosing an appropriate crisis response strategy.

Regarding to it, base responses during initial crisis need to be done, for instance defining what issues has occurred, how the issues might lead to crisis and affect the stakeholders both internal and external. The company need to adjusting information for what the company is doing to prevent a recurring of the crisis (Coombs, 2007). In addition to the complexity involved in crisis communication itself, digital communication technologies further complicate how crisis are managed and communicated worldwide (Veil, Buehner & Palenchar, 2011).

Especially, the nature of social media user that presents unique challenges to organizations' crisis communications strategies and responses.

III. METHODOLOGY

In order to examine in how food and beverage company responding the negative issue that appear on social media author refer to Creswell to answer the question 'how' and 'why', case study method can be applied to acquire holistic understanding on reality. According to Robert K. Yin (2012), the case study method is particularly useful while researching organisational, social, and management-related issues. As one of the qualitative approach, case study aims at discovering perspectives and building a common understanding upon them. Basically, the questions 'how' and 'why' are directed to the use of strategy, histories and experiment. In case study, various source of information is used to understand the case, therefore, data collection technic is done through depth interview, observation and literature study (Creswell, 2007). Case study method in this research is applied to examine crisis communication strategy of Garudafood in responding harm ingredients issue due to government regulation about food additive warning label that should be officially printed in their packaging. In how Garudafood intensively involving their employee and make them as valuable asset to organization particularly in dealing with external stakeholders in particular customers. In this research, applied exploratory case study which is case research to acquire early information on social research that is doing. Using single case method because there is only one case that examine deeply.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

PT. Garudafood Putra Putri Jaya Tbk that has established since 1958 in Pati-Central Java has two subsidiary which are PT. Sinarniaga Sejahtera to distribute their product and GoldenbirdPasific Trading Pte.Ltd. Their vision is to be the leading food and beverage company as their tagline is leading in innovation. Meanwhile, their mission is to become company that bring transformation through creating value added for society with the empowerment principle.

The policy of Garudafood is to be fully committed in safety, healthy, food security, quality, halal guarantee, environmental and regulation. The objectives of this policy are to maintain and continuity improvement to the whole working and production process in order to be safe from all aspect and comply with laws and regulations. For their commitment to the company policy, Garudafood has won various certification for their Food Safety Management, Quality Management System, Environmental Management System, Halal Product Guarentee, Indonesia National Standartds for Biscuits and Certification of Economic Operators. Currently, Garudafood has developed five food and beverage brand which are Garuda for their peanut products, Gery for their confectionery and biscuits products, Chocolatos for their chocolate drinks and bicusits products, Leo for their potato chips products and Clevo for their dairy products (garudafood.com).

Crisis begin when there was customer publish negative issue about some of Garudafood products on social media Facebook as the biggest social media platform in Indonesia. On their Facebook's wall the user wrote as summary below:

“Waaah..it’s getting viral..it turns out that in the packaging is printed IT SHOULD NOT CONSUMED BY CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OLD, PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING WOMEN...with tiny font...I have just known it...later if I bought groceries I will prove it by myself. It’s dangerous, I should more careful... - with ‘mention named’ and 52 others.”

The message was posted on August 2014 and it was recurring on March 2018 through Whatsapp group that the content is almost the same which is:

“FYI..justshare..It turns out that in the packaging of (okky jelly drink, gery wafer roll, sirup ABC and pilus Garuda) there is written SUGGESTED TO BE NOT CONSUMED BY CHILDREN UNDER 5 YEARS OLD, PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING WOMEN...with with tiny font...I have just known it... It’s dangerous, I should more careful...”

More complete, it written like this “CONTAINS OF ARTICIAL SWEETENERS, IT IS SUGGESTED TO BE NOT CONSUMED BY UNDER 5 YEARS OLD, PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING WOMEN”



Figure 1: Screenshot Facebook

Source: Corporate Communication PT. Garudafood

Regarding to those caution message that printed on their packaging, Garuda Food claimed that they make sure that their product is fully safe to be consumed and has halal certification and comply with Badan Pengawas Obat dan Makanan Republik Indonesia (BPOM RI) regulations as the National Agency of Drug and Food Control. Garudafood printed the caution message because they are fully committed to the government regulation that every product which are contains food additive must be listed caution message on their packaging.

The whole production process to the caution printed label on product packaging has complied with the Ministry of Health Regulation Number 033 Year 2012 about Food Additive and Decree of Chief of National Agency of Drug and Food Control Republic of Indonesia number 4 Year 2014 about the maximum limit for using food additives as cited from the interview with Corporate Communication and Relations of Garudafoodsaid that all of Garudafood products has listed in BPOM RI and acquire SuratIjinEdar (NIE) which is Letter of Distribution Permission that starting with statement BPOM RI MD or BPOM RI ML that confirm that the products have complied all the requirement and safe to be consumed.

In addition, caution message that printed on their product packaging is needed as consumers' right for the clear, clarify and honest information about the condition and guarantee of goods and services.

However, the caution message that printed on Garudafood products has mislead the consumer. They though that the company is cheated on them and causing bad effect on their health. Responding those negative issues that has gone viral on social media and chat platform, Garudafood through their Corporate Communication and Relations planning carefully to handle those negative issues. Moreover, the world has changed, the way company responding the negative issues have evolutionary due to the rapid development of technology, they cannot implement same conventional crisis communication strategy. Held press conference or rely on press release is considered to be ineffective and costly.

Garudafood take corrective action by improving the role of their employees in responding the crisis. Employees can play an essential role in responding crisis communication. Focus to their internal stakeholders and utilize them as alert system to prevent and anticipate further crisis. Employee can be representative of the company and leverage them as the trusted source of information for their friends, relatives and communities. Employees should be clearly informed about what has occurred and keeping them up to date. In responding crisis, speed is very important but still need to be accurate.

Employee should make sure and keep messages consistent, therefore to answer the questions related to the issues they were guided by Frequently Answered Questions (FAQ) sheet that consist of question that frequently ask by customers and the written answer as the guidance to answer the question. Corporate Communications and Relations Department distribute the key message through email to all internal stakeholders and spread it also through chatting group. Garudafood describe that the way they focus on internal is the most effective ways to tackle the issues. It is riskier if they spread the clarification through media, because they cannot control what the media are published. Instead, through their employee the company have confidence because the employee will defend their workplace as they have interest to the company. If the reputation damage it will decrease sales and affect to their income. However, the credibility of employee as spokesperson of the company still to be considered for that reason. In order to increase the credibility of the message, the company should also support the employee by designing official message for instance press release through their official website, social media Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, and also mass media. Press release template with the logo at right corner above and give detail information regarding the use of aspartame as artificial sweetener in their products are safe and has complied all the government regulations and they also put the link about the regulations and customer services contact if there any inquiries related to those issues. The press release as picture below:



KLARIFIKASI RESMI GARUDAFOOD

Jakarta, 23 Maret 2018

Dengan hormat,

Sehubungan dengan maraknya *issue* yang beredar di masyarakat mengenai produk GarudaFood di sosial media, maka dengan ini kami sampaikan bahwa ;

1. ***Issue* tersebut berpotensi menyesatkan. Produk GarudaFood aman untuk dikonsumsi karena telah mendapatkan sertifikasi halal dan memenuhi aturan BPOM RI.** Diharapkan masyarakat dapat lebih bijak dalam menyikapi berita yang beredar di media sosial.
2. Sebagai perusahaan yang berkomitmen pada kepatuhan terhadap regulasi, maka ;
 - a. **Seluruh proses produksi hingga pencantuman label keterangan pada kemasan produk GarudaFood telah sesuai dengan Peraturan Menteri Kesehatan RI Nomor 033 Tahun 2012 Tentang Bahan Tambahan Pangan** dan Surat Keputusan Kepala Badan Pengawas Obat dan Makanan RI (BPOM RI) nomor 4 Tahun 2014 tentang Batas Maksimum Penggunaan Bahan Tambahan Pangan Pemanis.
 - b. **Seluruh produk GarudaFood telah terdaftar di BPOM RI dan mendapatkan Nomor Izin Edar (NIE) yang diawali dengan tulisan BPOM RI MD atau BPOM RI ML yang menyatakan bahwa produk tersebut telah memenuhi persyaratan dan aman untuk dikonsumsi.**
 - c. GarudaFood memiliki sistem penjamin mutu (*Quality Assurance System*) untuk memastikan produk sesuai dengan regulasi yang berlaku.
3. **Klarifikasi BPOM RI tentang Bantahan Atas Berita Terkait dengan Keamanan Aspartam ;**
 - <http://www.pom.go.id/new/view/more/pers/223/Bantahan-Atas-Berita-Terkait-dengan-Keamanan-Aspartam.html>

Demikian informasi ini kami sampaikan, untuk informasi lebih lanjut dapat menghubungi *Customer Service* GarudaFood di **021-7289-7777** / customer@garudafood.com.

Hormat Kami
PT. GarudaFood Putra Putri Jaya

PT GarudaFood Putra Putri Jaya
Head Office: Wisma GarudaFood, Jl. Bintaro Raya No.10A, Jakarta 12240 Indonesia
P: +62 21 7290110 (Hunting) F: +62 21 7290112
www.garudafood.com

Figure 2: Press Release of Garudafood

Source: Corporate Communications and Relations of Garudafood.

Official clarification message that are released by the company still necessary to increase the credibility of the message and employee as the source of information. Besides, by adding information from related parties in this case BPOM RI will strengthen the message and build trust from external stakeholder in particular customer.

V. CONCLUSION

Crisis communication strategy that has planned carefully in utilizing employee to be source of information is an effective approach that Garudafood has done. Employee can be valuable asset to organizations to prevent the escalation of further crisis. Company should trust and maintain an honest relationship with the employee. Giving employee transparent information and make sure they are truly have understanding about the issues is the way more effective and efficient than held press conference and using mass media to spread the clarification messages. It because employees have interest, therefore they will defend their company from any negative issues that lead to crisis which are able to harm the company.

However, the credibility still to be considered for that reason also. One of the source of credibility is trustworthiness. It can be harmful to the company if external public has perception that employee is only defend their workplace and do not have intention to say the truth that the message is designed by company. To increase the credibility of the message and source of information, the company should also give official information through their official website and sosial media also involving the regulator to give clarification.

After all, negative issues are able to occur anytime, and the company should be ready to respond it immediately. The longer a company waits to respond, the larger the crisis gets. When an organization ignores what customers said or written in social media, publics can start to think differently and come with their own conclusion that can mislead the information and can give bad effect to the reputation of the company. Every crisis should be handled carefully because certain communication strategies can be vastly effective in some cases meanwhile unsuitable in others. In the end, every response to a crisis should make customers as their priority, a sincere and genuine gesture in explaining what has happened and an intention to give what's best for the customer will help crisis blow over and regain trust.

LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD

This study analyzed how organization in particular food and beverage company handle crisis communication situation. Using a case study approach, this study examined how Garudafood respond negative issues through developing the role of employee. However, study forward is needed to gain more knowledge in how the company especially the food and beverage industry that regularly facing this kind of crisis. Extend research with different method in how company in the same field of industry are manage and recovery from the crisis situation are needed. Regarding to the dynamic of external and internal situation that can make every crisis handled differently because it has their own best practices. In addition, consumer intention to purchase products after the crisis are needed to be examined.

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