

## Responding Crisis Communication: The Role of Social Media in Building Brand Trust

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**Abstract:** Previous 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 industry that regularly facing this situation is in food and beverage. Dough Lab that known for their artisan cookies products as the object of this case study has to deal with the incident which video spread on social media that went viral within second. This study aims to examine in how Dough Lab respond the crisis that can lead to damage reputation by utilizing social media as source of information to external stakeholders in particular customers. Data collections through depth interview with the representative of corporate communications of the company supported by literature and previous research. Results shows the social media are able to be an essential role in responding crisis communications since they can be as source of information of the company to the stakeholders. However, their credibility is being considered since it delivered in their official social media which can fully controlled by the company. After all, the company should maintain to communicate transparent with the consumers and raise public intention to create user generated content to increase the credibility of the message and source of information.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of May 2024, social media Instagram and TikTok was shocked by a video showing a mouse enjoying eating cookies in the window of Dough Lab, a well-known brand of artisan cookies shop at PIK Avenue Mall in Jakarta. This video went viral within second and receives various reactions from the audiences (Putri, 2024). Responding to this issue, Dough Lab management immediately give a statement to the media that shop on PIK Avenue will be

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Food-related scandals reported in the news frequently spark heated discussion in social media outlets (Zhu, Anagondhahalli, & Zhang, 2017). 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 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). 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). 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. This paper will examine how Dough Lab handling crisis due to the incidents that spread in social media. The findings can contribute to the broader fields of crisis communication, corporate communication, and the used of digital communication for better crisis management in digital era.

## **METHOD**

In order to examine in how food and beverage company responding the incident issue that appear on social media author refer to Creswell to answer the question 'how' and 'why', case

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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 Dough Lab. In how Dough Lab intensively use social media Instagram as a channel for organization to communicate 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.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The founder of Dough Lab, Hana Makarim started her business from home kitchen in December 2017. Famous for its delectable hand-crafted cookies and using only high quality and natural ingredients, Dough Lab start to get more attention from cookies lovers. Two years later, Dough Lab opened its first shop in Senopati, Kebayoran Baru, one of the high-end district in Jakarta. Currently, in 2024, Dough Lab has 19 locations across Jakarta, Bogor, Bali and Surabaya. In addition to the premium artisanal baked cookies, Dough Lab also serve soft ice cream and coffee in the menu. Dough Lab offers unique “cookie personalities” the main product. For instance, The OG, the first cookie menu at Dough Lab a bite-sized chocolate chip cookie is represent classic loveable girl next door. Another favourite, The Flower Child, a vegan cookie filled with chunks of dark chocolate, represents someone who is compassionate and hopeful.

Even though, Dough Lab has carefully maintain their image as premium artisanal baked cookies that using only the highest quality ingredients which means also its hygiene and safety. However, incident can happened anytime without warning. It happened on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024 netizens recorded a rat gnawing on cookies at the Dough Lab outlet in PIK Avenue. In the 12 second length video, the little rat appeared from between the displays and gnaws at one of the cookie. None of the employees noticed of the rat because in the video, no one appeared to be guarding in front of the display.

What happened next is as can be predicted, the video went viral within second were watched by 1,1 million netizens causing many negative responses from audience (Desideria, 2024). The typical crisis management sees audience are complaining, debating, and discussing about the brand online. Many of these discussions may be factually inaccurate, and many will be from customers who have had bad experiences. These are the kinds of discussions that should be responded to, in the right manner. Corrective actions which was taken by Dough Lab was giving immediate response to the incident. Through official Instagram account, Dough Lag responded wisely to netizens' comments, saying that they would close the shop to carry out deep cleaning. Then, they also explained what other steps were taken to resolve the case, such as replacing all kitchen utensils, and apologizing for the inconvenience caused.

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**Figure 3. Negative comment and respond from Dough Lab**  
**Source: @dough.lab official Instagram account**

Not only through responding comments column, Dough Lab management through their official social media Instagram also uploaded press releases in the form of video statement and writings to clarify the issues that occur through the story feature on Instagram that put in the highlight. In the video, Dinda Paramitha as Generam Manager Operations of Dough Lab represent the company to respond to the incident. Dough Lab said that they have watched the video incident and it was shocking though Dough Lab still appreciate it and thanked the customer who sent the video. Dinda also explain further steps to respond the incident. First thing was that Dough Lab temporary closed the outlet for three days for cleaning procedures. The press release in the form of writing released by Dough Lab also explain more or less the same thing, which are apologizing, appreciating customers who provided information, and explaining comprehensive actions to resolve it. Dough Lab truly understand that deny the issue only will make it worse. Communication crisis may affect many aspect such as reputation damage that can cause loss of trust and credibility with stakeholders, financial losses such as decreased sales, loss of market share, or increased costs due to crisis management efforts, operational disruptions can make project delays and legal consequences might get regulatory fines, sanctions or even lawsuit.

Through the video, Dough Lab shows the destruction and disposal of products and packaging on display. Beside that, Dough Lab also disposed and replaced contaminated trays, cutlery and kitchen utensils. Other corrective action taken was work with a trusted and certified pest control experts to maintain the highest standards of cleanliness and safety. The incident at the PIK Avenue outlet also made Dough lab improve and switch to a closed display showcase to better protect the product. Lastly, Dough Lab will also collaborates with mall management to implement preventive measures, ensuring the safety and well-being of tenants and visitors.

Dough Lab try to rebuild brand trust through immediate and comprehensive action which well communicated through responding comment, press release and also video statement through their official Instagram account. Social media provides a platform for transparent communication during crises. Brands can admit mistakes, provide updates, and reassure customers, which helps maintain trust even in difficult situations.

According to situational crisis communication theory that focuses on the relationship between the type of crisis and the appropriate communication strategy, Dough Lab can be assessed as a company that can resolve crises appropriately and wisely. Every crisis is different,



and there is no simple set of rules about how to use social media in these situations. Related to this theory, Dough Lab is able to mapping the type of crisis so that able to give swift response and planning comprehensive action. Explain further step with clear and consistent message through official social media account to prevent more negative rumours spread out.

In the process of handling a crisis, it is important to be alert and responsive to negative issues that arise regarding the company. A responsive and fast response can reduce larger negative impacts that could affect the company's reputation. So, this is something that is worth emulating in the way Dough Lab handled the crisis that occurred. Since the first day the issue, Dough Lab immediately took action. They immediately closed the outlet to carry out deep cleaning, and quickly provided this information to the public through replies to comments on Instagram. This is able to maintain the trust of the public and stakeholders because they see that the company is able to act quickly in dealing with problems.

Appoint a spokesperson to explain the situation is also crucial to respond the issue. In the press release in the form of a video uploaded by Dough Lab, there is a spokesperson or spokesperson appointed to handle the case, namely Dinda as GM of Operations. Appointing a spokesperson is a crucial crisis response. The spokesperson functions as a source of information for the company in times of crisis, thereby helping to ensure that the message conveyed to the public is clear and consistent. Not only that, appointing a spokesperson during a crisis also shows the company's professionalism and credibility.

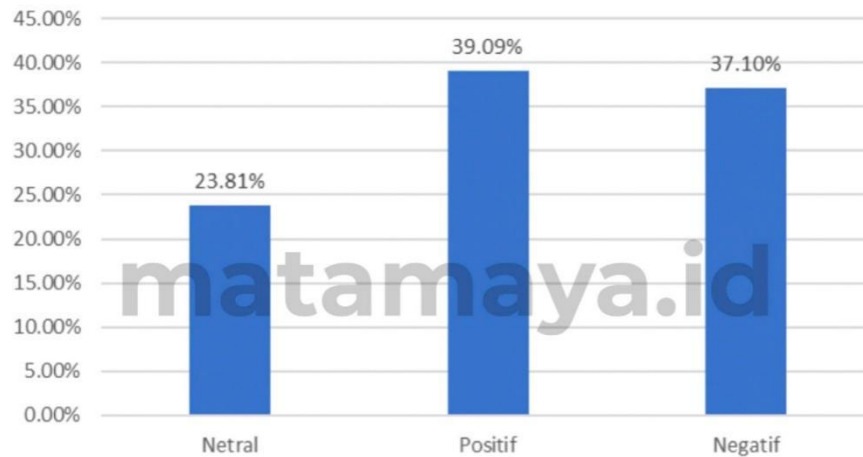
The first thing Dough Lab did in its official statement was admit its mistake and apologize to the public. This aspect is the most important thing in handling a crisis. This helps build and restore public trust in the company. Refusing to admit mistakes and even trying to cover up existing problems can actually worsen the situation and cause greater negative impacts.

When a crisis occurs, it is very common for companies to blame or even take legal action against the reporter. This is unwise handling of the crisis. Therefore, Dough Lab's appreciation by saying thank you to the reporter deserves a thumbs up. This proves that Dough Lab uses the customer-first principle, which places the interests and welfare of customers as the main priority. By appreciating whistleblowers, Dough Lab not only shows that they care about feedback, but are also committed to continuously improving their services.

In dealing with a crisis, usually companies only convey an apology without explanation in handling action. Dough Lab explained in detail the handling actions that would be taken so that the problem does not happen again. This shows that Dough Lab is not only admitting the mistake but also taking concrete steps to rectify the situation. This action also reflects a proactive and responsible attitude as a step to rebuild public trust.

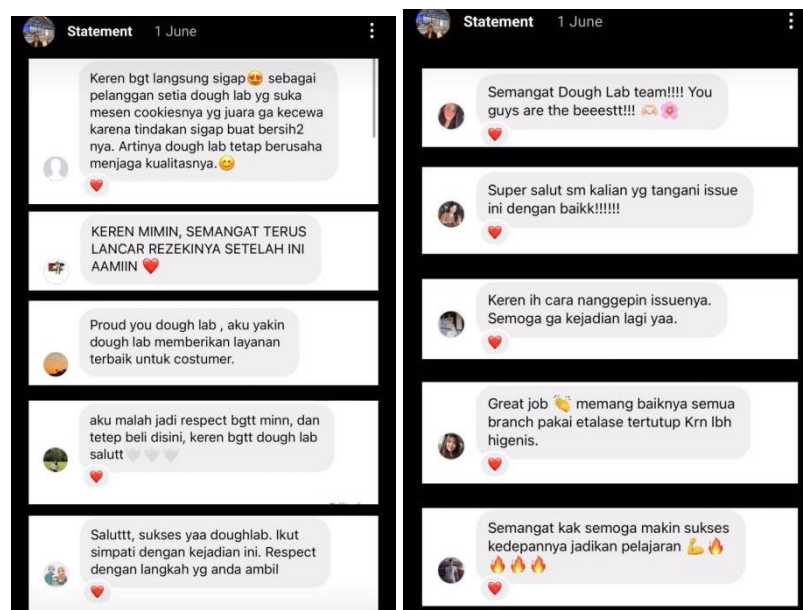
Besides utilizing platforms for communication, it is also important to monitor and track public sentiment and detect early signs of crisis that can be occur due to the previous incident. Regarding to the incident, the audience flooded Dough Lab's Instagram with criticism which generated negative sentiment of 37.10%. This criticism predominantly highlights the lack of cleanliness of Dough Lab outlets. Apart from that, it was also found that some audiences who initially liked their cookies were now hesitant to buy.

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**Figure 4. Sentiment about Dough Lab Incident**  
**Source. Matamaya.id**

However, amidst the many criticisms, Dough Lab showed a response that deserves appreciation. They do not try to cover up mistakes, but instead dare to admit their negligence. This can be seen from the official statement they uploaded on social media. Not only that, Dough Lab also took quick and appropriate action to overcome this problem. They closed the store for three days for a thorough cleaning, destroyed contaminated products and kitchen equipment, and worked with pest control professionals to ensure there were no more mice in the store. These swift steps paid off. Criticism of Dough Lab began to subside and was replaced with praise for their quick and responsive response. Positive sentiment of 39.09% shows that the audience also appreciates Dough Lab's steps in handling this crisis.



**Figure 5. Positive feedback**  
**Source. @dough.lab official account**

In the post-crisis phase, it is important to keep learning and adapting by conducting post-crisis analysis to identify areas for improvement. Keep maintaining open and transparent

communication to rebuild relationship and ensure ongoing trust. Building brand trust is an ongoing process. Brands must adapt and innovate in response to changing consumer expectations and market dynamics. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for establishing and nurturing brand trust. It provides businesses with an unprecedented opportunity to engage with their audience, showcase authenticity, and create meaningful connections. It provides a platform for announcing innovations, addressing concerns, and evolving to meet customer needs. Unlike traditional media, social media allows for real-time interactions between brands and consumers. Companies can respond to inquiries, address concerns, and engage in conversations with their audience, demonstrating a commitment to customer satisfaction and open dialogue.

In summary, the role of social media in building brand trust cannot be overstated. It offers businesses an opportunity to engage in two-way communication, showcase authenticity, and leverage social proof. By providing excellent customer service, fostering loyalty, and maintaining transparency, brands can create meaningful connections that foster trust. The key is to consistently deliver on promises, align with ethical standards, and adapt to evolving consumer expectations, which are all essential elements in cultivating long-lasting brand trust in today's competitive market.

## **CONCLUSION**

Crisis communication strategy that has planned carefully in utilizing social media Instagram to be source of information is an effective approach that Dough Lab has done. Social media can be an effective platform for organizations to prevent the escalation of further crisis. Company should trust and maintain an honest relationship with the consumers. Giving consumers 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 traditional mass media to spread the clarification messages.

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 message conveyed in official platform fully controlled by the company. To increase the credibility of the message and source of information, the company should still maintain transparent communication with the audience in order to gain more trust and create intention to spread the information willingly through user generated content as earn media to raise the credibility of the message and source of information.

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.

This study analyzed how organization in particular food and beverage company handle crisis communication situation. Using a case study approach, this study examined how Doough Lab respond negative issues through developing the communication through social media Instagram. 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

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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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