

Crisis Communication of PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan in the Pollution Case in Rantau Kopar Village

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Abstract: This study analyzes PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan's (PHR) crisis communication strategy in response to allegations of environmental pollution in Rantau Kopar Village in 2025. Using a qualitative, content-analytic approach, the study examined media reports, official statements, and academic literature on environmental communication and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The results of the study show that PT PHR predominantly used a diminishment strategy to reduce perceptions of the crisis's seriousness without admitting fault or apologizing. This strategy was chosen to maintain reputation and reduce legal risk, but it created a gap in public expectations regarding transparency and ecological responsibility. The study recommends strengthening communication strategies through a combination of diminishment, bolstering, and rebuilding elements, and increasing public engagement to sustainably restore public trust.

Keywords: Crisis Communication, Environment, Gas, Pollution

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi komunikasi krisis PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan (PHR) dalam kasus dugaan pencemaran lingkungan di Desa Rantau Kopar pada tahun 2025. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis isi, penelitian menelaah pemberitaan media, pernyataan resmi, serta literatur akademik terkait komunikasi lingkungan dan Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa PT PHR dominan menggunakan strategi diminishment untuk mengurangi persepsi keseriusan krisis tanpa memberikan pengakuan kesalahan atau permintaan maaf. Strategi ini dipilih untuk menjaga reputasi dan mengurangi risiko hukum, namun menimbulkan kesenjangan ekspektasi publik terkait transparansi dan tanggung jawab ekologis. Penelitian merekomendasikan penguatan strategi komunikasi melalui kombinasi diminishment, bolstering, dan unsur rebuilding serta peningkatan keterlibatan publik untuk memulihkan kepercayaan masyarakat secara berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Krisis, Lingkungan, Migas, Pencemaran

Introduction

The environmental pollution case that occurred in Rantau Kopar Village, Rokan Hilir Regency, Riau Province, in August 2025 drew public attention after residents reported the appearance of yellowish water mixed with mud and a black, oil-like substance, allegedly originating from PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan (PT PHR) 's operational activities. According to SMSNEWS.id (2025), residents submitted a formal complaint to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK), supported by a local youth organization, after waste flowed into residential areas and water canals used by the community. The sub-district executive board of the Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia (KNPI) in Rantau Kopar, representing the local



community, subsequently collected water samples and sent them to the UPT Health and Environmental Laboratory of Riau Province for examination. The results indicated the presence of iron, detergents, and other organic substances. This condition worsened environmental quality, causing skin irritation, foul odors, and the deaths of fish—one of the community’s primary sources of livelihood. The situation intensified public pressure on PT PHR to provide a clear explanation and assume proportional responsibility for the alleged pollution.



Figure 1. Screenshot of SMSNEWS.id coverage regarding alleged PT PHR waste pollution in Rantau Kopar.

Source : smsnews.id, 2025

This incident became increasingly sensitive as PT PHR had long been recognized for its strong commitment to Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility (TJSL) programs. The company repeatedly emphasized that upstream oil and gas operations could be carried out in parallel with environmental protection and social harmony. However, when the pollution occurred, the public began to question the consistency of this commitment in practice. The crisis further escalated as residents’ information and documentation spread through social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. This situation illustrates how public perception of a company can shift dramatically when allegations of ecological violations arise.

In environmental communication studies, the delivery of transparent, participatory, and responsibility-based information constitutes a fundamental principle for maintaining relationships between organizations and communities (Reynata et al., 2022). Ecological crises such as the one that occurred in Rantau Kopar require companies to provide clear clarification, as they involve public health, environmental rights, and community safety. When a company responds slowly or inadequately, public distrust can increase significantly. Therefore, this study examines the extent to which the principles of environmental communication are

reflected in PT PHR's response. This assessment is conducted by reviewing official statements, field data, and the perceptions of affected communities.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by Coombs and Schmidt (2000), serves as an important framework for evaluating organizational crisis communication strategies. The theory assesses the public's level of responsibility for a crisis and recommends specific communication strategies based on its categorization. In environmental pollution cases, the public tends to assign responsibility to the company for the impacts caused. Accordingly, PT PHR should adopt accommodative communication strategies, such as issuing apologies, ensuring transparency, and implementing recovery actions. This study evaluates the alignment between PT PHR's actions and SCCT principles in addressing the case.

Previous studies indicate that oil and gas companies in Indonesia often face complex challenges when pollution incidents occur. Husaini (2022), in his research on the Pertamina oil spill in Karawang, found that transparency of information was a key factor influencing reputational recovery. Rahmiana (2019), in her study of pollution in the Cisadane River, demonstrated that consistent environmental communication enhanced public understanding of ecological risks. Tandoc et al. (2018) also emphasized the importance of collaboration among government, communities, and corporations in preventing environmental conflict. These findings provide important references for analyzing PT PHR's response.

Although crisis communication has been widely studied, research integrating it with environmental communication in the oil and gas industry remains relatively limited. Much of the existing research focuses primarily on public relations aspects without examining broader ecological impacts. This study addresses this gap through an integrative approach that combines environmental communication perspectives with SCCT. This approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of how a corporation manages an environmental crisis. Furthermore, the analysis contributes to enriching the environmental communication literature in Indonesia.

The urgency of this study is heightened by the significant pollution risks associated with oil and gas exploration and production activities in populated areas. Rantau Kopar Village provides a concrete example of how industrial operations can directly affect public health, local economies, and community social life. Ecological crises that are not properly managed may trigger prolonged conflict and erode corporate legitimacy. Moreover, in the digital era, communities possess substantial capacity to elevate local issues to broader national attention. Therefore, it is essential to assess how companies restructure their communication strategies in such sensitive situations.

A number of previous studies on crisis communication in the industrial sector, including the oil and gas industry, have generally focused on corporate response strategies aimed at restoring reputation and managing corporate image in the aftermath of a crisis. These studies frequently employ the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) framework to identify crisis types and response strategies such as deny, diminish, or rebuild. However, they tend to approach crisis communication primarily from a managerial and reputational



perspective. Environmental aspects and social impacts on local communities are often positioned merely as contextual background rather than as central analytical variables.

In contrast to previous studies, the novelty of this research lies in addressing a gap in crisis communication studies within the oil and gas sector by directly linking corporate communication strategies with the principles of environmental communication. Through a case study of the pollution incident in Rantau Kopar Village, this research not only analyzes the crisis communication strategy of PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan (PHR) in responding to the pollution issue, but also evaluates the extent to which the strategy reflects principles of transparency, accountability, and concern for ecological impacts and affected communities. This focus distinguishes the study from earlier research, which tends to view crisis communication primarily as an effort to restore corporate image without assessing its alignment with environmental communication values.

In addition, this study offers methodological novelty by integrating multiple data sources, including media coverage, official corporate and government documents, and the dynamics of narratives circulating in the public sphere. This multi-source approach enables the researcher to identify discrepancies between the company's official communication and public perceptions shaped through mass media and digital discourse. While previous studies have generally focused either on analyzing official corporate messages or on examining public perception separately, this research integrates both within a single analytical framework.

Thus, this study contributes academically by expanding crisis communication research in Indonesia's oil and gas industry, particularly by positioning environmental dimensions and local community interests as integral components in evaluating corporate communication strategies. It is expected to enrich the crisis communication literature with a more contextual, ecologically oriented, and socially sensitive approach to the dynamics of affected regions.

This study aims to explain the forms and strategies of crisis communication used by PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan (PHR) in responding to allegations of environmental pollution in Rantau Kopar Village. More specifically, it seeks to analyze the alignment between the company's communication responses and actions with the crisis categories and recommended response strategies within the framework of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT).

In addition, the study evaluates the extent to which PT PHR's crisis communication aligns with the principles of environmental communication, particularly transparency, ecological responsibility, and public participation in addressing environmental pollution. This analysis provides insight into the effectiveness of the communication strategies employed. The findings are expected to offer valuable input for other companies facing similar risks.

Method

This study employs a qualitative content analysis of public texts to examine the crisis communication of PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan (PHR) in the alleged pollution case in Rantau Kopar Village. This approach enables the researcher to analyze various relevant written sources, including media coverage, official corporate statements and documents, government agency reports, and academic literature on crisis and environmental communication. A



qualitative method was selected because it provides an in-depth understanding of social phenomena by interpreting the context and meaning embedded in texts (Creswell, 2015). Through content analysis, the researcher identifies themes, patterns, and communication strategies that emerge in the company's responses, then evaluates them using the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) framework and the principles of environmental communication. Accordingly, this approach is relevant for systematically, theoretically, and contextually examining PT PHR's crisis communication strategy.

Data were collected by searching public texts for the keywords "PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan," "environmental pollution," and "Rantau Kopar" across national and local online media, as well as on the company's official websites and relevant government institutions' websites. The data were gathered from the initial reporting of the case through the stages of corporate response and crisis management. The texts analyzed were selected for their direct relevance to the pollution case and for their inclusion of official statements or responses from PT PHR, and were thus established as the units of analysis in this study.

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis with a thematic analysis approach (Moleong, 2017). The units of analysis in this study consisted of media texts, official corporate statements, and public narratives containing crisis communication messages related to the pollution case in Rantau Kopar Village. The textual units examined included news headlines, quoted statements from sources, paragraphs containing the company's responses, as well as sections representing public perceptions and media framing of the pollution issue.

The analytical process was conducted in several stages. First, an in-depth reading (close reading) of all documents was undertaken to understand the context of the events and the emerging narrative patterns. Second, an open coding process identified words, phrases, and statements related to corporate responsibility, environmental impacts, public demands, and the communication strategies employed. Third, these codes were grouped into categories and themes based on the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) framework and the principles of environmental communication, including transparency, ecological responsibility, and public participation.

The subsequent stage involved thematic interpretation, in which empirical findings were linked to the theoretical framework to assess the alignment between PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan's communication strategies and the crisis response models proposed in SCCT. Thus, the analysis extended beyond identifying message patterns to evaluating their communicative meaning and implications.

Data validity was ensured through source and theory triangulation (Sugiyono, 2018) by comparing media coverage, official corporate documents, and academic literature on crisis communication and environmental communication. This triangulation was conducted to ensure consistency of findings across sources and to strengthen the reliability of the research results. Through these stages, the analytical process became more systematic and transparent, enabling potential replication in future studies.

Results and Discussion



Results

The environmental pollution case that occurred in Rantau Kopar Village generated complex crisis communication dynamics among PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan (PHR), affected communities, local government authorities, and local media. The incident began with residents discovering indications of a waste leak allegedly contaminating residential areas and community land. This situation triggered public concern because it was directly related to access to clean water, the continuity of local economic activities, and the formation of negative perceptions toward the company. From a crisis communication perspective, such conditions required a swift, accurate, and ethical corporate response to prevent the escalation of negative perceptions in the public sphere.

The crisis intensified alongside increased local media coverage and social media discussions highlighting PT PHR's alleged involvement as the party considered responsible for the incident. The media provided substantial space for community voices demanding clear information, remedial actions, and compensation for the losses incurred. On the other hand, the company faced a dilemma: it had to manage public perception while safeguarding its corporate image, even though, in the early stages, it had not explicitly clarified its position or responsibility in the pollution case.

At the community level, the crisis led to a polarization of perceptions: some viewed PT PHR as negligent and lacking transparency, while others believed the company had demonstrated goodwill through social assistance and initial mitigation efforts. This tension reflected a misalignment between community expectations for corporate responsibility and the response communicated. When a crisis directly affects residents' daily lives, public perception becomes more susceptible to emotional responses, lived experiences, and media narratives.

At the corporate communication level, PT PHR appeared cautious in its public statements regarding the pollution incident. The communication strategy employed tended to be defensive, emphasizing on-site mitigation measures and coordination with relevant stakeholders, without explicitly acknowledging fault. This approach was likely chosen to avoid broader legal and reputational implications; however, it also affected public perception, with some viewing the company as insufficiently transparent in providing the explanations the community needed.

Based on qualitative content analysis using a thematic approach of media coverage, press releases issued by PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan (PHR), and related documents, four main themes were identified. These themes represent the patterns of crisis communication and public response in the pollution case in Rantau Kopar Village.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Media Coverage

No	Main Theme	Theme Description	Key Quotation	Source
1	Emergence of the Crisis and Concerns of the Local Community	The emergence of community concern due to alleged environmental pollution affecting water quality, environmental	"Residents of Rantau Kopar Village complained that the water had changed color and emitted an	Riau Pagi (09 Mei 2025)



		safety, and local economic activities.	odor, rendering it unfit for household and agricultural use.”	
2	Media Pressure and the Formation of Public Perception	Local and online media highlighted the alleged involvement of PT PHR and reinforced public demands for clarity and corporate accountability.	“Media coverage continued to highlight the company’s alleged responsibility for the pollution, which was feared to endanger the environment and surrounding residents.”	Haluan Riau Daily (2024)
3	Polarization of Community Perceptions	There was a divergence of views within the community between those who considered the company negligent and those who believed that PT PHR had demonstrated goodwill through social assistance.	“Some residents considered the company negligent in its environmental management, while others stated that PT PHR had demonstrated concern through social assistance.”	Local Media (2025)
4	Defensive Corporate Communication Strategy	PT PHR’s communication response placed greater emphasis on technical mitigation measures and coordination efforts, without an explicit acknowledgment of responsibility.	“PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan stated that it had undertaken mitigation measures in accordance with established procedures and coordinated with the relevant authorities.”	Company’s Statement in Local Media (2024)

Source: Research Result

The first theme indicates that the environmental pollution case in Rantau Kopar Village generated complex crisis communication dynamics among PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan (PHR), the community, local government authorities, and local media. The incident began with residents’ findings regarding alleged waste contamination in areas surrounding residential neighborhoods and land used for daily activities. This situation sparked public concern because it directly affected access to clean water, environmental safety, and the sustainability of local livelihoods.



These community concerns were clearly reflected in local media coverage. One report noted that residents experienced significant changes in environmental quality following the alleged pollution incident. The newspaper *Riau Pagi* reported:

“Residents of Rantau Kopar Village complained that the water had changed color and emitted an odor, rendering it unfit for household and agricultural use.” (Riau Pagi, May 9, 2025).

The coverage indicates that the community perceived the crisis as a direct threat to their daily lives. In the context of crisis communication, this initial phase reflects increasing public demands for the company to respond promptly, transparently, and responsibly in order to prevent the escalation of negative perceptions. The dominant keywords in this theme include: environmental pollution, community concern, contaminated water, waste impact, and community livelihood.

The second theme demonstrates that the crisis intensified as local and online media extensively highlighted PT PHR's alleged involvement as the party responsible for the pollution. The media not only reported the incident but also framed it as an issue of corporate environmental responsibility. In one report, *Harian Haluan Riau* linked the alleged pollution to environmental safety risks surrounding oil and gas operational areas. The newspaper wrote:

“Former drilling sites were considered inadequately sealed and potentially hazardous to the safety of nearby residents.” (Harian Haluan Riau, April 24, 2025).

Such media narratives reinforced social pressure on PT PHR and contributed to shaping public perception that the company had not optimally applied environmental precautionary principles. In this regard, the media played a significant role in amplifying and intensifying the crisis within the public sphere. The dominant keywords in this theme include: media coverage, public pressure, corporate responsibility, environmental safety, and public opinion.

Furthermore, the third theme indicates that, at the corporate communication level, PT PHR adopted a relatively cautious stance in issuing public statements. The company's primary focus was on technical mitigation measures and coordination with relevant authorities, without explicitly acknowledging fault.

One report noted that the company's clarification remained limited to field-handling procedures. *Harian Haluan Riau* wrote:

“The company stated that it had undertaken mitigation measures in accordance with established procedures and coordinated with the relevant authorities, without addressing any operational negligence.” (Harian Haluan Riau, 2024).

Within the framework of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this communication pattern can be categorized as a deny-or-diminish strategy—an effort to minimize the attribution of fault to protect the company's reputation. However, this strategy carries the risk of creating public perceptions that the company is insufficiently transparent. The dominant keywords in this theme include: corporate clarification, technical mitigation, defensive strategy, reputation protection, and limited acknowledgment.

The fourth theme indicates a misalignment between PT PHR's communication response and the principles of environmental communication, particularly regarding transparency and



public participation. Although the company conveyed technical information, the community felt that it had not been adequately involved. This sentiment was reflected in residents' statements expressing that they had not received clear explanations. One media report noted:

"The community expects an open explanation from the company regarding the long-term environmental impacts, not merely temporary mitigation measures." (Riau Pagi, 2025).

This situation led to polarization of perceptions at the community level and indicates that the crisis communication efforts did not fully function as a means of building trust and securing the company's social legitimacy amid the environmental crisis. The dominant keywords in this theme include: transparency, public participation, ecological responsibility, public trust, and social legitimacy.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan's crisis communication in the pollution case in Rantau Kopar Village was shaped by the interaction among community concerns, media coverage, and corporate communication strategies. The emerging themes underscore that the effectiveness of crisis communication is determined not only by technical mitigation measures but also by the company's ability to deliver transparent, responsive messages aligned with the principles of environmental communication.

Discussion

The research findings indicate that PT PHR's decision to frame its public response within a diminishment pattern—aimed at reducing the perceived severity of the incident without formally acknowledging fault—is consistent with the SCCT model, which recommends aligning responses with the level of responsibility attributed to the organization. SCCT asserts that organizations within the *accidental cluster* tend to adopt diminishing strategies to limit responsibility attribution and potential reputational damage when evidence of intentional wrongdoing is weak (Cheng & Cameron, 2022). The situational analysis presented earlier demonstrates that interpretations of the crisis were not uniform but were shaped by perceptions, lived experiences of those affected, and narratives constructed by the media. Therefore, to obtain a clearer understanding of the company's position in this crisis, this study applies Coombs's Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Within the SCCT framework, crisis types are classified into three categories, enabling an assessment of how this pollution incident can be positioned along the spectrum of organizational responsibility.

a. *Victim Cluster*

Within the *victim cluster* classification, the organization is positioned as a party that is itself a victim of the situation. In this case, PT PHR does not fully fall into the victim cluster category, as the pollution incident did not arise from uncontrollable external factors such as natural disasters or sabotage. However, the company sought to create the impression that it was not entirely at fault and that the incident was an unintentional operational error. This effort is reflected in its decision not to issue a direct apology, while still maintaining a presence in the community by providing social assistance to affected residents.

b. *Accidental Cluster*



The pollution case in Rantau Kopar is more closely aligned with the *accidental cluster*, which refers to crises resulting from technical errors or unintentional incidents. Within this framework, the company is perceived as bearing a moderate level of responsibility, because although the incident was not deliberate, the public may still attribute elements of negligence. PT PHR's stance that the pollution was not entirely its fault indicates an effort to frame the case as a routine technical incident rather than one caused by serious negligence. This positioning underlies the emergence of a communication strategy aimed at reducing the perceived severity of the crisis.

c. *Preventable Cluster*

The preventable cluster, on the other hand, refers to crises arising from significant negligence or organizational actions that could clearly have been avoided. In this study, some community members expressed the view that pollution could have been prevented if the company had implemented stronger monitoring and leak-prevention systems. However, PT PHR did not acknowledge the crisis as a form of negligence falling within the preventable category. By avoiding this classification, the company sought to minimize potential moral and legal claims. It consistently maintained the narrative that the incident was technical in nature and not entirely within its direct control.

Although the SCCT classification suggests that the pollution case in Rantau Kopar most closely aligns with the *accidental cluster*, PT PHR sought to maintain its position outside the *preventable cluster*, which entails a higher level of attributed responsibility. This understanding of crisis typology subsequently influenced the company's communication pattern, leading it to adopt response measures considered safer for its reputation. Rather than openly acknowledging fault, the company opted for strategies to reduce public perceptions of the crisis's severity.



Figure 2. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) Diagram
Timothy Coombs (2007)

Based on SCCT theory, there are four main strategies for handling a crisis: denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering. In the case of PT PHR, this study found that the most dominant strategy was diminishment, which focuses on reducing the level of crisis seriousness

in the public's eyes. The company emphasized that the incident was not entirely within their area of fault, while simultaneously conveying that the pollution's impact was still within manageable limits. PT PHR reported that mitigation efforts were carried out promptly and in accordance with procedure, so the crisis was not considered to indicate a major failure in the company's operations.

PT PHR did not fully use a denial strategy, but there were elements of indirect denial in their refusal to admit fault or apologize. They chose not to provide clarifications that led to a formal admission of responsibility. This approach shows that the company sought to avoid giving the impression that it was the party explicitly at fault for the incident. However, the company still carried out emergency response actions and provided assistance, which then became part of a strategy to display social concern without admitting fault.

The rebuilding strategy, which includes apologies and formal compensation, was not used by PT PHR because they assessed that this incident did not require a high-level admission of guilt. The absence of a formal apology indicates that the company did not want to be placed in the preventable cluster, which bears the heaviest responsibility. Instead, they preferred a pragmatic approach to social action and operational assistance as a form of moral responsibility, rather than acknowledging a structural error.

In the context of Rantau Kopar, this communication choice appears to be triggered by legal concerns and reputational threats, leading PHR to focus on presenting technical actions and social assistance rather than a formal apology. However, the diminishment strategy must also be balanced with transparency to maintain the company's long-term credibility.

Analysis of local media and community reports indicates a gap between public expectations (clarification, recovery, compensation) and the company's messages. Local media highlighting residents' demands strengthens the company's attribution of responsibility, ultimately increasing public pressure even though the company chose not to admit fault (SMSNEWS.id, 2025). This is consistent with corporate crisis research in Indonesia, which shows that local news coverage can accelerate reputational escalation when the organizational response is perceived as inadequate. Therefore, media management and information disclosure become important variables in mitigating reputational impact.

The historical relationship between the company and the community also shapes public response in a crisis. SCCT emphasizes that crisis history and prior relational reputation can increase the attribution of responsibility, even when the issues that arise are accidental (W. T. Coombs, 2011). Research findings show that some members of the Rantau Kopar community perceive the pollution incident as part of a pattern of environmental problems related to oil and gas activities in the region. This is consistent with previous research stating that energy companies often face heavier reputational hurdles due to the sensitivity of environmental issues (Yasir, 2022). Consequently, bolstering through CSR is not strong enough to balance public perception.

From the perspective of communication channels, PT PHR relied more on delivering information through institutional and technical channels than on two-way engagement with the public. This situation created a gap between residents' communication needs and the company's



formal communication style. Studies on crisis communication show that delays in information and a lack of interaction with the public enlarge the space for misinformation and negative interpretation (Diana & Ayuningtyas, 2023; Mikraj & Rahastine, 2025). In this case, the communication vacuum was filled by residents and the media, which made the situation's framing less favorable for the company. As a result, the company lost control of the public narrative in the early stages of the crisis.

Legal and regulatory implications also add additional pressure on corporate communication strategies; pollution allegations place the issue not only in the realm of reputation but also in the potential for administrative and criminal sanctions under environmental laws (Dewi et al., 2025). Uncertainty regarding initial evidence made the company cautious about issuing statements that could be interpreted as an admission of guilt, so the diminishment strategy was chosen to manage legal exposure. However, environmental policy literature asserts that a response perceived as avoidant can increase pressure from the public and regulators if field evidence continues to emerge. Therefore, the balance between legal compliance, technical transparency, and communicative empathy becomes crucial (Jejaksiber.com, 2025).

In the context of communication governance, this study's results show the need for a more integrative approach among technical verification, public communication, and relationship recovery strategies. SCCT emphasizes that crisis responses must be adaptive and contextual, especially when an organization faces evidentiary uncertainty (W. Coombs, 2022). Research in the oil and gas sector shows that multi-stakeholder approaches, such as independent audits and community dialogue forums, can increase organizational credibility during a crisis (Purwandari et al., 2023). Therefore, PT PHR can adopt a layered response model to reduce public pressure while maintaining the company's long-term integrity.

Overall, this study confirms that PT PHR's use of the diminishment strategy is rational within the context of reputation protection and legal considerations. However, this approach cannot fully meet public expectations that desire clarification, transparency, and more concrete recovery steps. The crisis communication literature states that restoring public trust requires more than just social assistance; rather, it requires a long-term commitment to accountability and systemic improvement (Hidayati & Purworini, 2025). Therefore, PHR's future communication strategy should consider a combination of diminishment, bolstering, and rebuilding elements if technical evidence points to operational responsibility. This more comprehensive approach will increase the chances of a more sustainable reputation recovery.

Conclusion

This study concludes that PT Pertamina Hulu Rokan's (PHR) crisis communication strategy in the pollution case in Rantau Kopar Village predominantly employs a diminishment approach, as explained by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). PT PHR sought to reduce the perceived seriousness of the crisis by asserting that the incident was not the result of the company's direct negligence; thus, it did not issue a formal apology or admit fault. This strategy serves to maintain reputational stability and avoid legal consequences, but



it also creates a gap in public expectations for clarification, transparency, and more comprehensive recovery steps. Furthermore, the historical relationship between the company and the surrounding community, along with the escalation of local media coverage, strengthened the attribution of responsibility, so the applied diminishment strategy was not fully effective in dampening public pressure.

Based on these findings, the study suggests that PT PHR develop a more comprehensive, adaptive, and responsive crisis communication strategy that accounts for local social dynamics. The company needs to combine the diminishment strategy with strengthening and rebuilding elements, including increasing transparency of information, creating space for two-way dialogue, and involving independent third parties in the environmental impact verification process. Implementing open environmental audits, regular information delivery, and a more structured community grievance mechanism can strengthen public trust. In addition, the company needs to integrate a crisis protocol grounded in community-centered communication, so that the response is not only oriented toward reputation but also toward restoring social relations and fulfilling moral responsibilities sustainably.

Further research is suggested to review how the effectiveness of crisis strategies can be influenced by new variables such as digital media ecology, local culture, and power dynamics between companies and affected communities. Thus, future crisis communication studies can offer more relevant policy recommendations for the extractive industry and other stakeholders to foster more accountable environmental governance.

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