

EXAMINING CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND ONLINE ACTIVISM IN INDONESIA: A CASE STUDY ON 2022 VOTRE PEAU

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas krisis yang dialami oleh salah satu brand kecantikan lokal Indonesia, Votre Peau, pada tahun 2022. Krisis ini muncul pasca peristiwa internal yang menampilkan "best dress challenge", dikritik habis oleh netizen karena dianggap menghina Islam dan perempuan. Krisis ini mendatangkan berbagai kecaman dari netizen dan gerakan online untuk memboikot atau *cancel* brand itu lantaran kekecewaan konsumennya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji strategi komunikasi krisis yang diterapkan oleh Votre Peau sebagai respons terhadap aktivisme online. Analisis data kualitatif dilakukan melalui studi kasus dengan menggunakan konsep dari aktivisme digital dan teori perbaikan citra oleh William L. Benoit. Temuan analisis menunjukkan bahwa Votre Peau menerapkan strategi perbaikan citra dengan memberikan klarifikasi terbuka dan permintaan maaf di media sosial. Akan tetapi, meskipun upaya tersebut dilakukan, konsumen yang kecewa merasa cara itu tidak efektif dan terus melanjutkan gerakan *cancelling* terhadap Votre Peau. Aspek menarik adalah paradoks *slaktivisme* yang menunjukkan penurunan tren gerakan boikot bersamaan dengan menurunnya viralitas gerakan tersebut. Artikel ini berkontribusi untuk menegaskan pentingnya strategi komunikasi krisis karena dialog yang cepat tersebar di media digital dapat sangat mempengaruhi reputasi perusahaan atau merek. Oleh karena itu, memiliki rencana komunikasi krisis yang baik sangatlah penting untuk menghadapi berbagai situasi, terutama di era digital seperti saat ini.

Kata kunci

Aktivisme Online, Image Repair, Komunikasi Krisis, Votre Peau

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the crisis experienced by a local beauty brand, Votre Peau, in 2022, following an internal event featuring a "best dress challenge" that was heavily criticized by netizens for being perceived as disrespectful towards Islam and women. This crisis drew condemnation from netizens and sparked an online movement to boycott or cancel the brand due to consumer dissatisfaction. The research aims to examine the crisis communication strategies employed by Votre Peau in response to online activism. Qualitative data analysis is conducted through a case study utilizing concepts from digital activism and image repair theory by William L. Benoit. The analysis findings indicate that Votre Peau implemented image repair strategies by providing open clarifications and apologies on social media. Despite these efforts, disgruntled consumers feel that the approach was ineffective and continued the cancel culture movement against Votre Peau. An intriguing aspect is the *slactivism* paradox, which shows a decline in the trend of the boycott movement simultaneously with the decrease in its virality. This article contributes to underscores the importance of crisis communication strategies as rapid dialogue dissemination in digital media can profoundly impact the company's or brand's

reputation. Therefore, having a good crisis communication strategy is crucial for addressing various situations, especially in digital era like today.

Keywords

Crisis Communication, Image Repair, Online Activism, Votre Peau

Introduction

This article examines crisis communication strategies employed by Votre Peau in response to online activism. Votre Peau is a local beauty brand in Indonesia established in 2015. The popularity of Votre Peau has experienced rapid growth due to the increased interest of the public, particularly among the millennial and Generation Z demographics, in beauty products. In recent years, there has been an upsurge in Indonesian public interest in local beauty products. According to a survey conducted by Populix in July 2022, as reported by Katadata Media Network, 54% of 500 Indonesian women preferred using local brands for their beauty products (Pahlevi, 2022). This has consequently positioned the beauty product sector as a flagship industry in Indonesia. The use of digital technologies such as the internet and social media has played a significant role in enhancing the popularity of local beauty brands like Votre Peau (Dimara, 2018).

Amidst its rapid growth, Votre Peau encountered a significant incident in 2022, resulting in a communication crisis that had implications for its reputation. During the Ramadan month of that year, Votre Peau organized an internal event for owners and employees, featuring a gathering and a communal iftar. The event also incorporated a "best dress challenge" to add excitement to the evening's program. One male employee participating in the challenge wore conservative attire, including a veil. Subsequently, the employee lifted his clothing, revealing his thigh, and walked as if he was on a catwalk show. This action received applause, and all attendees joined in laughter. It is widely acknowledged that conservative attire and the veil are symbolic of Muslim women and should not be treated lightly (Namakule, 2022).

This incident was uploaded on the Instagram Story of one of the owners of Votre Peau, Dr. Ricky Maharis, and was thus witnessed by the followers. Consequently, this action received its first wave of negative reactions from a skincare reviewer named Uni Rizka. Through her Twitter account @oenniebeauty, Uni Rizka stated that this was an act of religious blasphemy and an affront to Muslim women. Uni Rizka's tweet gained support from netizens, leading to the amplification of cancel culture against the Votre Peau brand. Many netizens expressed their refusal to purchase Votre Peau products due to this issue. In response to the matter, Dr. Ricky Maharis, the owner of Votre Peau, promptly deleted the post and personally apologized to Uni Rizka, acknowledging that this incident served as a learning experience (Riani, 2022).

Furthermore, an apology was also conveyed through Votre Peau's Instagram Story, emphasizing that they had no intention of offending anyone. To address the issue, Votre Peau also terminated the employment of the involved employee. Unfortunately, netizens perceived this as an attempt to shift blame, as Votre Peau solely held the employee responsible for the blasphemous act, whereas religious issues are highly sensitive (Marshall, 2018) in Indonesia.

The situation became increasingly complex, giving rise to various protests and online activism movements on social media calling for a boycott of Votre Peau. Online activism has emerged as a phenomenon due to the widespread use of the internet and social media across different sectors of society. The concept of online activism revolves

around the use of technology to digitally propel various civil society activities, particularly in the context of democratic nations. Social media platforms, with Twitter being prominent, serve as crucial spaces for online activism (Rahmawan et al., 2020). Online activism represents a digital mass movement that introduces a new paradigm in the field of digital public relations, particularly in the domain of digital crisis communication. It can be triggered by the misalignment between netizens' expectations and the reality presented by an organization or company through digital media (Arief, 2022). Any digitally active organization or company needs to be vigilant and responsive to evolving societal issues to avoid sparking online activism. Neglecting these concerns can lead to crises that impact the image and reputation.

Various studies have done to develop research in this field. To begin with, several studies discuss about the importance of crisis communication in public relations activities, to maintain corporate reputation (Aprinta, 2014; Coombs, 2007; Jin & Smith, 2018; Nirmalasari, 2020; Prastya, 2011; Works et al, 2021). As follows, studies done by Constantinides (2014); Kaul & Chaudhri (2015); Wigley & Zhang (2011); and Wojcik & Hughes (2019), explain about the use of social media in managing corporate reputation in digital era. Also, image repair theory by Benoit, used in previous studies conduct by Indrayani (2022); Kurnal (2021); Kyhn (2008); and Seeger & Padgett, (2010). These studies analyze the use of image repair theory as a crisis communication strategy. Then, other studies describe the cancel culture and online activism phenomenon that can threaten corporate reputation (Haskell, 2021; Lim, 2013, 2017; Nirmalasari, 2020; Norris, 2023; Rahmawan et al, 2020). However, there are no studies that specifically discuss about the effect of crisis to small business. This article emphasizes the importance of good crisis communication plan, even for small business. Because in this digital era, potential crisis can occur from every detail of company activity.

In reality, crises are a common occurrence in the life cycle of every company or organization. Consequently, every entity should possess effective crisis management. When a crisis has already emerged, it is imperative to implement crisis management to safeguard the company's reputation. The pivotal component of crisis management is crisis communication (Jin et al., 2018). Crisis communication plays a crucial role in addressing crises in the contemporary digital era. While the advent of digital media facilitates companies in conducting their marketing and public relations activities, it simultaneously heightens the potential for crises (Morissan, 2010). Therefore, this article seeks to analyze how *Votre Peau* executed crisis communication in response to the phenomenon of online activism. Also, it is significant to underscores the importance of crisis communication strategies as rapid dialogue dissemination in digital media can profoundly impact the company's or brand's reputation, eventhough it is still a small business.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing the case study method. By employing this approach and method, the researcher aims to gather detailed and in-depth data on a specific phenomenon or event (Rahardjo, 2017). The data collection technique in this study concentrates on observing the case, media coverage, posts, and comments during the communication crisis experienced by *Votre Peau*. The research data is qualitatively analyzed through a systematic process (Sugiyono, 2015), applying the concepts of digital activism and the image repair theory introduced by William L.

Benoit. The content triggering the crisis, reuploaded on Twitter by Uni Rizka, a skincare reviewer, is presented in a chronological manner. Equally significant are the diverse reactions from netizens condemning *Votre Peau's* actions, interpreted in accordance with the language used and explicit actions expressed through comments or replies on Twitter. An analysis is conducted on *Votre Peau's* official apology and the ensuing reactions from netizens to assess the efficacy of the crisis communication and image repair strategies employed by *Votre Peau*. Furthermore, by scrutinizing this phenomenon through the lens of image repair theory within the context of online activism, elements are identified for evaluation in the realm of crisis communication, particularly within the cyber domain.

Result and Discussion

Online Activism and Corporate Reputation

In 2010, CNN reporter Sara Sidner, citing a ComScore report (a global media analytics company based in America), coined the term "Twitter Nation" for Indonesia, highlighting its status as the country with the highest Twitter addiction rate worldwide. Beyond being a platform for enjoyable tweeting activities, the Indonesian community leveraged Twitter as a "tool" for driving social change (Shubert, 2009; Nugroho, 2011; (Lim, 2013). In essence, social media, particularly Twitter, served as a facilitating space for the emergence of critical discourses among users, believed to propel and support the advancement of democracy and freedom of speech (Lim, 2013).

In its development, social media has gained widespread popularity across diverse demographics. The capability of social media to facilitate users in creating, editing, and disseminating various intentionally crafted content has resulted in numerous public dialogues and discussions on specific issues (Constantinides, 2014). In the context of business activities, this phenomenon also propels changes in the landscape of marketing and public relations, aiming to build and sustain the image and reputation of a company or brand to uphold public trust. Networking, or establishing connections, is a prevalent practice when individuals engage in conversations within social media platforms. These platforms act as bridges for communication and interaction among stakeholders, easing the monitoring of ongoing dialogues for companies and brands (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015). Consequently, companies are compelled to adopt social media as a supportive tool for their business and marketing activities to reach an even broader market.

In an effort to facilitate conversation and dialogue between *Votre Peau* and its consumers, as well as among consumers themselves and between existing and potential customers, *Votre Peau* maintains a verified Instagram account with 66.8 thousand followers. Through its Instagram platform, *Votre Peau* not only posts its products but also various promotional events and campaigns it is undertaking. For instance, it posted a video testimonial featuring several women sharing their opinions on educated women and career women in celebration of International Women's Day. Another attention-grabbing post for *Votre Peau's* Instagram followers was a graphic text post stating "We're Sorry," which garnered 627 likes and generated a cascade of comments (nested comments) inquiring about the current status of the brand. It was only a few days later that it was revealed that *Votre Peau* was in the midst of a content series leading up to the launch of its latest hair care product. The conversational dynamics within this Instagram account reflect how consumers in the digital space significantly contribute to determining the sustainability of a brand. In other words, consumers hold the power to

shape discourses through discussions in digital spaces, contributing to the emergence of online activism.

Conversely, online activism constitutes a digital mass movement that poses potential threats to an organization's reputation. It materializes as a response to the failure of organizations, companies, or brands to meet public expectations (Nirmalasari, 2020). This movement frequently unfolds on social media platforms, where conversations can rapidly spread within a wide-reaching scope. Social media functions as a tool that fortifies online activism, leveraging the ease of sharing information, messages, and engaging in expressing opinions (Subarjo & Setianingsih, 2020). Additionally, the anonymity feature within social media contributes to the rise of online activism, facilitating effortless participation from various locations and minimizing associated risks (Lim, 2017). In essence, online activism encompasses various forms, including online petitions, advocacy efforts, crowdfunding, and mass online movements, such as the utilization of hashtags and cancel culture (McNutt, 2018).

The rapid evolution of social media has given rise to a new digital culture known as cancel culture. Understanding cancel culture is not a static concept but is closely linked to specific phenomena involving significant shifts in public attitudes through discourses that emerge (or are created) on social media (Haskell, 2021). In the context of this societal transformation, cancel culture can be viewed as an outcome of democratization in Indonesia, facilitated by activist practices utilizing digital technology, particularly social media, as a dissemination medium. Reflecting on Indonesia's history, the early days of the internet were harnessed by students during the New Order era to bolster anti-Soeharto movements. Efforts to mobilize masses during that period heavily relied on communication media free from government control, such as telephones, faxes, and emails (Rahmawan et al., 2020). The success of students in employing digital media to mobilize the masses and demand Soeharto's resignation marked the genesis of digital activism practices. These practices have become increasingly prevalent in the Reform Era, ushering in significant changes across various domains, including journalism, media industries, politics and campaigns, as well as marketing and public relations.

The massive backlash faced by *Votre Peau* due to the best dress challenge content, ignited by Uni Rizka, can be interpreted as an instance of cancel culture. Despite Uni Rizka clarifying in her tweet that her decision to cease buying *Votre Peau* products was solely her personal choice, stating, *"if you want to buy or use their products, feel free to do so. I have no right to forbid you,"* which received 1,664 likes on Twitter. It is imperative to seriously take the disappointment and anger expressed by consumers on social media platforms into account, as it poses a serious threat to the previously established reputation. Even after *Votre Peau* issued an apology, there remains a significant number of consumers and followers resorting to profane language that contradicts religious values that they were initially complaining. Ironically, their derogatory remarks directed at *Votre Peau*, such as *"bangsat"* (bastard) and *"bacot"* (shut up), only serve to undermine their own credibility, while some express hopes for *Votre Peau*'s demise. Additionally, several potential consumers expressed relief and gratitude for having abstained from purchasing *Votre Peau* products. The unrestricted ability of netizens to voice critical and sharp comments regarding this event not only reflects principles of democracy and freedom of expression but also highlights the convivial nature of the internet and social media. With easy access, a variety of convergent features, and attributes like low cost, extensive reach, and widespread availability, coupled with a degree of resistance to

control and censorship (Lim, 2013), the mobilization of opinions and movements on social media platforms becomes increasingly facilitated.

Nirmalasari's study (2020) concludes that the digital era and the advent of new media create an increasingly fast-paced rhythm, bringing disruption to marketing activities, especially in public relations. The current public can easily interact directly with organizations and brands, whether in the context of positive dialogue or expressing complaints. A significant differentiator between conventional and digital marketing and public relations practices lies in the use of the internet as a medium for the exchange of transactions, information, and interactions between an organization and its stakeholders (Chaffey, 2009). The internet and everything associated with it are almost always linked to speed. Not only speed in transactions (buying and receiving products), but the public, especially customers, expects higher standards that prioritize speed in terms of service. The 2017 Microsoft survey, documented by Kompas, revealed a 54% surge in customer expectations for customer service compared to the preceding year. Even since the early rise in the popularity of social media, Chaffey & Smith, p. (2017, p. 21) reports that as much as 44% of consumers use their Facebook accounts to share negative product experiences through online interactions with fellow consumers to obtain a swift response from the brand's company. The inability of an organization to control rumors and various public opinions emerging in the virtual space will have serious implications for the sustainability of that brand, including the emergence of online activism movements.

Online Activism and Crisis: Call for Boycotting Votre Peau

Amidst the rapid advancements in digital information technology, companies inevitably must adapt and embrace "novelty" in communication, collaboration, consumption, and every innovation aspect (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015), enabling the creation of new interaction patterns that have not occurred before. The increasing penetration of the internet and the accessibility of smartphones also contribute to the high usage of social media in Indonesia. According to research conducted by APJII in 2023, the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 215 million people. This is further supported by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has increased internet usage among the public.

According to the April 2023 report from business strategic consultant OOSGA, Indonesia registered 188.6 million active social media users throughout 2022, constituting 68.9% of the total domestic population. Furthermore, these users spend an average of 3 hours and 28 minutes per day on social media. Indonesia is ranked third globally, following China and India, with an annual growth rate of 12.6%. This data indicates that consumers are actively engaged in various corporate aspects, particularly reputation, on social media, marking a departure from reliance on traditional media for consumption activities. Dialogues and interactions emerging from consumer and customer engagement on social media significantly impact a company's business sustainability. Consequently, there is a growing need for proficiency in effectively utilizing these platforms. Valor's assertion (cited in Kaul & Chaudhri (2015)) reinforces the idea that the internet and social media serve as powerful tools for enhancing reputation when strategically employed.

The escalating trend in the use of digital ecosystems for managing Corporate Reputation (CR) compels companies to pay even closer attention to the use of social media as a communication channel. Borrowing the term from Kaul & Chaudhri (2015),

social media has evolved into a "mantra" for reputation management, particularly in anticipating and recovering from crises. This is closely related to the nature of crises, characterized by their sudden, unforeseen, and unavoidable aspects (Argenti, 2009), capable of inducing panic amid information uncertainty and the emergence of potentially reputation-threatening rumors (Weiner, 2006). Amidst this information chaos, companies must be capable of mastering and controlling the spread of information, as the presence of social media can exacerbate the situation by provoking circulating rumors (Prastya, 2011). To avoid such chaos, preventive efforts become crucial to mitigate the risk of reputation decline and the erosion of public trust in a brand. If a crisis has already occurred, as experienced by *Votre Peau*, crisis management needs to be executed maximally to maintain public trust and prevent its abrupt disappearance due to poor crisis handling. In this effort, crisis communication becomes the primary weapon in crisis management, as crises are always surprising and unpredictable (Argenti, 2009). Therefore, in situations of uncertainty, swift responses within a short timeframe are required to protect the brand's reputation (Imran, 2017).

In a chronological sequence, *Votre Peau* only became cognizant that the internal event gave rise to a crisis after the video footage of the occasion was posted on Instagram. The response from its followers ensued a day after the event. In the video, one of the employees took part in the best-dressed challenge, adorned in modest clothing along with a face veil. Generally, modest clothing, hijab, and even the face veil symbolizes significant cultural attributes that represent one's Muslim identity. Unfortunately, rather than showcasing his Muslim identity positively, the male employee intentionally lifted his clothes, revealing his thigh, and conducted himself like a model. Adding to the irony, he then expressed "syukron" (thank you) while facing the camera. Strikingly, this "performance" garnered an animated response and applause from all the attendees, encompassing both Muslim and non-Muslim individuals (Namakule, 2022). This incident was interpreted by one of *Votre Peau*'s followers, Uni Rizka, as demeaning to women and religion (Riani, 2022). She articulated her criticism on Twitter, accumulating 31.2 thousand likes and 8,000 retweets for her thread.

Here, crisis communication assumes a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of the ongoing crisis. In their study, Wigley & Zhang (2011) emphasized that, beyond being a fundamental element in crisis management, the success of an organization in handling a crisis is positively linked to its efforts to control the information flow by formulating and disseminating key messages, particularly through media channels such as social media. Following a chronological sequence, upon Uni Rizka expressing her concerns via her Twitter account, @onniebeauty, *Votre Peau* promptly sent a direct message expressing gratitude for the insights and assessments provided by Uni Rizka, concluding with a sincere apology. A noteworthy aspect is that Uni Rizka acknowledged at the outset of her thread that the video depicting the event, shared as an Instagram story, which sparked public criticism, had been removed even before she had personally viewed it. This indicates that *Votre Peau*, led by Dr. Ricky as the owner and the initial uploader of the story, recognized the potential for the content they shared to trigger a crisis and jeopardize their brand. Removing the post was an initial and prudent step taken by *Votre Peau* to manage the information landscape by minimizing the chances of misinformation and disinformation. This scenario highlights the evolving challenges brought about by social media as a digital platform in the field of public relations, where both content

producers and consumers vie to be the first in shaping, disseminating, and consuming information on these dynamic platforms (OECD, 2021).

Figure 1. The clarification and apology posted on Votre Peau's official Instagram account



Source: Instagram/@votre_peau

Votre Peau's response to the crisis went beyond the removal of posts and personal apologies; it extended to a public apology through both Instagram feeds and stories. Strategically, the brand utilized the available time to manage the surge of information during the crisis. According to Pinsdorf, p. (1991, p. 34), companies or brands ideally have a "40 minutes to a maximum of 12 hours" window to convey messages, whether in the form of clarification or statements explaining their version of events. Within a 24-hour timeframe, Votre Peau took actions aimed at reducing the risk of reputational damage due to the crisis. This included deleting posts, offering a personal apology to Uni Rizka, and issuing a public apology, all achieved in less than 24 hours.

In an effort to fill the information gap during the crisis (Prastya, 2011), Votre Peau's actions can be considered quite successful. Despite garnering thousands of likes and retweets, some netizens argued that Uni Rizka's concerns were not entirely accurate. They pointed out that wearing black, covered attire, and a veil are not absolute attributes of a Muslim, as these fashion elements are commonly seen in Middle Eastern countries.

This indicates that joking while wearing modest attire does not necessarily demean a specific religious identity. The presence of these counter-arguments demonstrates that even in a crisis situation, when crisis communication is executed correctly, the balance of information and an organization's credibility can be maintained, potentially resulting in an improved reputation compared to pre-crisis conditions (Kyhn, 2008).

Instead of harshly judging *Votre Peau*, Uni Rizka clarified that her sense of disappointment should not be taken literally or universally by her readers. She emphasized that the decision to stop using *Votre Peau* products was her personal choice and not an encouragement for others to follow. On the contrary, she allowed her readers to continue purchasing and using *Votre Peau* products, explicitly rejecting any association with promoting cancel culture. The only logical inference for this assumption is the fact that canceling is a form of social media practice and the utilization of social platforms for activism. Additionally, by expressing her criticism through Twitter, it is not surprising that Uni Rizka's thread is not simply interpreted as an expression of her personal frustration shared within her social circle.

Haskell's study (2021) revealed that Twitter positions itself as a space for ongoing communication on a mass level, allowing users to create social discourse by exercising their right to freedom of speech and the opportunity to be heard throughout the "Tweetsphere" (p. 6). Moreover, Pew Research Center's 2019 research found that Twitter users are generally young, educated, and tend to be Democrats (Wojcik & Hughes, 2019). As a result, social issues related to race, gender, and other minority identities become the focus of the Twitter audience, often evolving into serious social discourse through conversations. Therefore, it is not surprising that Uni Rizka's thread on her Twitter account was able to mobilize a large audience and impact *Votre Peau*'s image, accusing the brand of demeaning women and Islam specifically.

Facing Cancellation: *Votre Peau*'s Image Restoration Strategy

Ulmer (2019) offered a revolutionary perspective in their book "Effective Crisis Communication: Moving from Crisis to Opportunity," identifying crises as not only posing threats to image and reputation but also presenting opportunities for organizations to achieve their highest priority goals. Despite their unpredictable nature, crises can intrinsically lead to positive improvements through learning and evaluation processes, allowing companies to rise and develop even better than before the crisis. However, realizing this potential requires concerted efforts to deploy available resources for a swift and appropriate response that maintains, or potentially enhances, the company's positive image (Coombs, 2007). In a deterministic perspective, Horn et al. (2015) pointed out that three main actors can influence a company's reputation when a crisis occurs: customers, employees, and the company itself. They concluded that crises often negatively impact a company's reputation due to the company's inability to effectively manage risk mitigation.

According to Benoit (2015), a crisis is an unforeseen and undesirable event that poses a threat to a company's reputation. Crises can occur at any time without warning. When dealing with a crisis, each company holds complete responsibility for addressing the emerging issues. The repercussions of a crisis can affect a company's image and reputation in both the short and long term. Therefore, in 1995, William L. Benoit introduced the image repair theory to study companies' response strategies to crises. This theory revolves around a company's image and reputation, based on the premise that image is a critical aspect for a company. Hence, all crisis management strategies

should prioritize the restoration of a company's image and reputation in the eyes of the public (Seeger & Padgett, 2010).

Benoit's (2015) Image Repair Theory is a facet of crisis communication that delves into strategies suitable for situations where a company's reputation is jeopardized due to a crisis. These strategies are classified into five comprehensive image restoration approaches commonly utilized by contemporary businesses. This categorization is grounded in the recognition that image and reputation are invaluable assets for a company. Furthermore, as outlined in an article by Kurnal (2021), Benoit (2015) image repair theory classifies image restoration strategies into five categories, including denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. The five image restoration strategies are first, denial. This strategy involves rejecting or refuting the occurrence of a crisis that poses a threat to reputation. Often, this strategy is implemented by providing evidence or arguments aimed at avoiding acknowledgment of the allegations. The second strategy is evading responsibility, attributing the crisis to factors beyond the company's control. This strategy is divided into three components: provocation (asserting that the crisis was provoked by something), defeasibility (claiming that the crisis occurred due to a lack of information or resources), accident (attributing the crisis to an unforeseen event), and good intentions (stating that the true intention was for a benevolent purpose, not to cause problems). The third strategy is reducing offensiveness, achieved through minimizing perceptions and negative assumptions arising from the crisis by demonstrating that the company is not entirely at fault. This strategy is divided into six components: bolstering (emphasizing the company's past goodness), minimization (convincing the public that the crisis is not as severe as imagined), differentiation (showing that other companies have also made similar mistakes), transcendence (comparing various crises), attacking the accuser (blaming others), and compensation (providing restitution).

The fourth strategy involves corrective action, wherein the company acknowledges errors and pledges to promptly rectify them by implementing changes in policies or adjusting standard operating procedures (SOPs). This demonstrates the company's responsiveness and its commitment to taking tangible steps to address the crisis. The fifth strategy is mortification, which entails admitting mistakes, expressing sincere regret, and offering genuine apologies for events that have caused harm to all parties involved. The expectation is that the public will empathize and pardon the company's errors (Benoit, 2015; Kurnal, 2021; Works et al., 2021). In accordance with Benoit's theory, Votre Peau implemented image restoration strategies through its clarification and apology shared on Instagram (Figure 1). The apology post exhibited the bolstering strategy in the initial paragraph with the following narrative (translated to English):

"Hello Votre Beaus, thank you for faithfully accompanying Votre Peau's journey. Since becoming a part of the Indonesian family, we have consistently endeavored to remain a brand that contributes positively and consistently offers the best skincare products for everyone."

This narrative reflects Votre Peau's effort to address the issue through bolstering, emphasizing that the company has maintained a positive image and consistently strived to offer the best for everyone. This can be an effective strategy to remind the public of Votre Peau's reputation since its establishment. Furthermore, the strategy employed by Votre Peau is attacking the accuser, as evident in the following narrative (translated):

"Unfortunately, one of our employees participated in inappropriate behavior. This action was purely the individual's personal initiative and had no intention of offending anyone. However, we acknowledge that this is entirely unjustifiable and should not have been done. We have taken strict action by terminating the individual on April 12, 2022."

In the presented narrative, Votre Peau endeavors to clarify that the crisis or issue at hand is not a result of their actions but rather stems from the inappropriate behavior of an individual employee. The post is rounded off with a corrective action, offering sincere apologies, and framing the incident as a valuable learning opportunity. These strategies were fully employed to salvage Votre Peau's reputation. However, even after the official apology, netizens perceived it as an attempt to deflect blame. Criticisms were directed at Votre Peau for asserting that the inappropriate action was solely the individual employee's initiative, despite evidence showing the owner and other staff members of Votre Peau laughing during the incident. Additionally, to convey their disapproval of the action, Votre Peau announced the termination of the employee. Despite these measures, the post continued to attract inflammatory comments from netizens, exacerbating the tarnishing of Votre Peau's image (Putri, 2022). Notably, this prolonged crisis was left unaddressed by Votre Peau, allowing negative narratives and provocative rumors to persist on social media during that period.

The strategies for image restoration revolve around a company's rhetorical skills through improvisation and the crafting of messages that align with the crisis context. This plays a crucial role in shaping how the public perceives the company both during and after the crisis. It is a common practice for companies to integrate various image restoration strategies, which is generally considered an effective approach. However, inconsistencies and errors in message selection can result in the failure of image restoration efforts, leading to the erosion of public sympathy (Indrayani, 2022). In the case of Votre Peau, these shortcomings exacerbated the crisis, hindering its resolution.

#CancelVotrePeau: Activism or Slactivism?

Despite facing various criticisms that led to calls for boycotts and perceptions of an invitation to cancel the brand, the situation necessitates a more intricate analysis. When delving into digital activism, the central role of the public's participation in the practice of activism using technology and digital networks becomes apparent. Rahmawan et al. (2020) highlighted several debates related to comprehending the meaning of "participation" by the public in the realm of digital activism. This skepticism is fueled by the abundance of simplified activism practices, such as expressing opinions, participating in online forums, or creating and sharing online petitions, which are subsequently digitally endorsed. Various pejorative terms like "clicktivism," "slacktivism," "keyboard activism," and "desktop activism" aid in identifying practices that may be considered forms of participation while also raising questions about the essence of the activism activities themselves.

These diverse forms of activism are significantly influenced by the character of social media as a cyberspace providing a platform for individuals from various societal strata to engage in information consumption, production, and distribution of ideas, knowledge, and culture. This sequence of activities gives rise to a participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009) acting as the infrastructure for social-political activities involving the public or civic engagement. In this context, social media emerges as the primary tool for mobilizing various social movements by amplifying the voices of public interests (Rahmawan et al., 2020).

In the *Votre Peau* case, we can identify at least two aspects demonstrating the occurrence of activism and, concurrently, the paradox of slactivism. Firstly, the heightened virality of Uni Rizka's accusations regarding religious and gender-based harassment by the brand effectively attracted a substantial audience on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram, leading to a collective movement to cancel *Votre Peau*. This corresponds with the aims of activism, which includes mobilizing the masses to exert social pressure on the target, commonly known as ostracism (Norris, 2023). The contagious nature of this issue also provoked extensive reactions from the public, given the sensitivity of matters related to sexism, racism, and phobia against specific groups within certain communities. Essentially, the endorsement of boycotting *Votre Peau* by Uni Rizka and others on social media serves as a tangible expression of the canceling action itself, constituting a component of digital activism. The escalating engagement of the public in digital spaces further compelled *Votre Peau* to promptly implement crisis management measures.

Fascinatingly, the calls for a boycott gradually faded alongside *Votre Peau*'s apology posted on Instagram. It can be said that the post has at least served as the culmination of the cancel culture events experienced by *Votre Peau*. Although the comment section still contains numerous accounts expressing disappointment, it seems that this did not have as significant impact as Uni Rizka's previous post. This is because the most crucial element driving the boycott movement is virality (Prihanto, 2023), implying that the more viral content is on social media, the greater the impact on influencing the masses caught in the vortex of virality to take action. However, it is essential to acknowledge that, based on prior experiences in Indonesia, virality is not an absolute indicator of sustainability. Sustainability, in this context, entails not only a sense of progressiveness and continuity but also encompasses additional value within the unfolding process. The viral call to boycott artist Nikita Mirzani through online petition did not necessarily correlate with the longevity of the boycott. Despite the pervasive nature of the boycott and numerous expressions of animosity towards Nikita, she continued her usual activities on social media, seemingly unaffected by the boycott's resonance. Similarly, the public demand for all media and TV stations to stop providing space for artists suspected of domestic violence like Rizky Billar and Ferry Irawan also did not last long. Several months after the case was resolved, the public seemed to forget what they had fervently advocated before. In fact, these once-controversial artists are currently being celebrated once again by their fan base.

The second point of contention involves critiques of the effectiveness indicators of digital activism. In "Many Clicks but Little Sticks: Social Media Activism in Indonesia," Lim (2013) challenges the classification of the *Votre Peau* boycott as online activism. He argues that the term "activism," even when facilitated through online media and technology such as social media, should still manifest in mass movements, street protests, or various offline activities. This skepticism towards public participation in online activism gives rise to concerns, with some hesitating to characterize it as activism, preferring to view the boycott as click activism and slactivism. The exact impact on *Votre Peau*'s revenue post-incident remains unknown. Furthermore, the transient nature of virality supports the social media paradox as an instrument of slactivism. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that the mass participation constructed in this context is not solely social; it involves cultural participation (Lim, 2013, p. 638), playing

a role in boosting engagement, whether participating in offline boycotts or simply clicking specific buttons like "like" and "retweet" on Twitter or liking on Instagram.

Despite the paradox inherent in online activism, it is imperative for a brand to have a well-formulated crisis mitigation strategy. Calls for canceling and boycotting can present a significant threat to a brand's sustainability. In the case of *Votre Peau*, while the incident did not result in prolonged conflicts post-apology, it is crucial to underline that public dissatisfaction will still resonate with consumers. An illustrative example is the Twitter account @almiraaudi expressing discontent, accompanied by a thumbs-down emoji, regarding a snapshot from *Votre Peau*'s fashion show, perceived as disrespectful to Islam, despite the user expressing satisfaction with *Votre Peau*'s sunscreen product. Consequently, brands must adeptly navigate the convergence of media phenomena and adopt a cyber public relations approach (Aprinta, 2014) to construct and manage communication with their stakeholders.

Nirmalasari (2020) conceptual study outlines six practical strategies that organizations can employ to navigate crises stemming from online activism. These strategies include (1) integrating social media into communication strategies, (2) engaging in personalized online dialogues, (3) cultivating positive relationships with mass media to facilitate effective communication during crises, (4) ensuring timely and accurate online clarifications, (5) mastering the use of hashtags, and (6) collaborating with like-minded stakeholders. *Votre Peau* can proactively implement these strategies to anticipate potential future crises, continuously monitoring social media discussions and regularly evaluating public engagement through interactions with each social media post. Additionally, preparedness for various crisis scenarios and the swift execution of precise communication strategies are vital for promptly addressing unforeseen crises. Collaborative efforts with diverse entities are highly recommended to strengthen the brand's image, uphold brand values, and act preventively against potential crises.

CONCLUSION

The convergence of media in the contemporary era has exerted a significant influence on the landscape of public relations, particularly concerning crisis management. A prevalent crisis in the realm of social media is the emergence of cancel culture or the call for boycotting a brand, often considered a manifestation of digital activism. Consequently, organizations are compelled to adapt and integrate "novelty" into various aspects, encompassing communication, collaboration, consumption, and any innovation (Kaul & Chaudhri, 2015) fostering the development of new interaction patterns.

The increasing trend in the use of digital ecosystems to manage Corporate Reputation (CR) urges companies to pay more attention to the utilization of social media as a communication channel. This is grounded in the belief that social media has become a "mantra" in reputation management, particularly in anticipating crises and restoring image post-crisis. The sudden, unforeseen, and unavoidable nature of crises (Argenti, 2009) can create panic amidst uncertain information and rumors that have the potential to threaten a company's reputation (Weiner, 2006). Amidst information ambiguity, companies must effectively control the flow of information, recognizing that inappropriate actions can worsen the situation. In the event of an already transpired crisis in *Votre Peau* case, crisis management should be executed to its fullest extent to uphold public trust and avert its decline due to inadequate crisis resolution. Crisis

communication plays a pivotal role in this effort, serving as the primary tool in crisis management to rectify the damaged image resulting from the emergence of boycott campaigns against the brand.

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that Votre Peau has implemented Benoit's image restoration strategy by providing clarification and an open apology on social media. The bolstering effort is also evident in Votre Peau's attempt to highlight its positive image to consumers. However, unfortunately, in applying this image restoration strategy, Votre Peau seems less sincere in admitting its mistakes, especially evident in the inappropriate choice of words, such as implicating an employee as the cause of the crisis. Votre Peau's decision to terminate the employee is also considered insufficient in resolving the main issue of the negative public reactions manifested in online activism. The boycott movement and canceling actions against Votre Peau have made this issue more viral, despite the apology that has been issued.

Although cancel culture has its paradoxes, such as skepticism toward online activism being viewed as lazy activism (slacktivism), this does not diminish a brand's responsibility to adopt preventive and curative measures in facing crises. Therefore, in addition to embracing digitalization in the implementation of public relations, intensive monitoring of conversations in digital spaces is crucial. The utilization of features on social media platforms can help trace messages that may potentially lead to a crisis, enabling quick actions to be taken before or during a crisis.

To finish, this study has limitation. We use social media observation to collect the data and as the core of analysis. And then we approached it with theoretical and critical framework. Thus, for future research can use audience analysis to explain this type of crisis communication from audience perspective and behavior. This way can enrich research, study, and perspective related to crisis communication strategy in digital era, that can be use as conceptual and theoretical advancement in public relations study field.

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