Managing and responding to the crisis of sexual harassment at the University of Argopuro

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sexual harassment incidents at higher education institutions can trigger crises that have a detrimental impact on public trust and institutional reputation. **Purpose:** This study analyzes the crisis management and reaction approach employed by the University of Argopuro in the aftermath of a sexual harassment event involving its Rector. **Methods:** The study employed a qualitative case study approach and collected data through in-depth interviews with senior administrators and document analysis. **Results:** The findings reveal that the university implemented a five-step crisis management model, integrating adaptive strategies with Image Restoration Theory (IRT) and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). These strategies focused on transparency, accountability, and victim protection. The study highlights those key methods, including appointing a spokesperson, issuing press releases, forming a crisis management team, and establishing a Gender Studies Centre to foster systemic reform and prevention. The study offers four novel crisis response strategies: attitude statements for transparency, victim protection plans, organizational accountability mechanisms, and follow-up initiatives to sustain cultural transformation. While SCCT and IRT provided a foundational framework, this study highlights the limitations of the frameworks in addressing the deeper systemic issues surrounding sexual harassment, emphasizing the need for long-term cultural change. Moreover, the results highlight the need to integrate crisis communication theories with adaptive, victim-centered approaches to address preventable crises effectively. **Conclusions:** The study concludes that a comprehensive and transparent crisis management process can mitigate reputational damage, restore stakeholder trust, and promote systemic reforms. **Implications:** The study contributes to public relations literature by establishing the applicability of combined theoretical and adaptive strategies in complex academic crises, recommending practical insights for public relations practitioners in higher education institutions worldwide. Future research should expand the application of these strategies across diverse cultural and organizational contexts to validate their effectiveness.

Keywords: Adaptive strategy, crisis management, crisis response strategies, public relations, sexual harassment

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment is not a new case that can occur anywhere, whether it is in the workplace, the community, or educational institutions. The National Commission of Woman and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia published the Annual Report 2021, revealing that universities experience the highest frequency of sexual harassment compared to other educational institutions (Andriansyah, 2022). A survey conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia in 2021 revealed that the campus environment accounted for seventy-seven percent of cases of sexual violence and harassment (Napitupulu, 2023). However, more than sixty percent of the victims did not report the case to the Police department because they were worried about getting negative stigma from society and considered the university to be less progressive in its protection of the victims' rights.

Sexual harassment in higher education institutions has been a subject of scientific debate among researchers for the last decade. Some scholars have researched to analyze sexual harassment in higher education institutions from different perspectives (Fitri et al., 2021; García-Hernández et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2022; Konlana & Dangahc, 2023;

Naqibullah et al., 2022). Within the realm of public relations, sexual harassment serves as a subject of investigation that centers on issue and crisis management, with the development of communication crisis strategy. For example, Madden (2018) conducted a previous study that examined the role of dialogue in proactively communicating about sexual assault issues in twenty-one universities across the USA. The study suggests that the university's issue manager worked to open conversations, to make places for dialogue, and to provide new ways for students to improve their communication skills to talk with their peers regarding sexual assault. Brunson, Chandler, Gronval, Ravi, Sell, Shearer, and Schoch-Spana (2020) examined the case of sexual harassment at the University of Kentucky, USA, in order to analyze the implementation of various communication tactics in response to the crisis and the stakeholders' reactions.

According to some scholars (Adawiyah et al., 2022; Noer & Kartika, 2022), sexual harassment incidents in Indonesian higher education institutions occur when lecturers sexually assault students, when male students sexually assault female students, and when academics sexually harass university administrative staff. A special case happened at the University of Argopuro in the province of East Java in which the CEO (Rector) committed sexual harassment against the academic staff—

reported that the alleged victim experienced harassment while traveling by car to a city in the Pasuruan district to participate in an official training program. The harassment reached its peak when the perpetrator attempted to initiate non-consensual physical contact by kissing the person present in the hotel room.

A preliminary investigation revealed that the Rector of the University of Argopuro, implicated in sexual harassment, reacted disparagingly to a media story. The perpetrator asserted that his conduct was unintentional. The spouse of the victim made a claim and filed a complaint, alleging that his wife had been subjected to harassment. The perpetrator voluntarily resigned, leaving a void in the institution's leadership. Permanent authorities have taken control of the situation, but the university faces a dilemma as the offender holds the highest position. The rectorate must respond and enact procedures to address sexual harassment situations, as public disclosures of these incidents have necessitated such actions.

Instances of sexual assault taking place at higher education institutions can potentially have a deleterious effect on the institution's standing, posing challenges for its subsequent recovery. Merchant, Rose, Moody, and Mathews (2015) assert that a university facing a sexual violence situation could potentially negatively affect the student enrolment process.

Likewise, an unfavorable reputation might impede the recruitment of potential academic and staff members to the college (Merchant et al., 2015) to the point where private funding sources may diminish due to investors hesitating to align their reputation with the university (Gennaioli & Shleifer, 2018). The potential repercussions of one or a mixture of these factors can be significant as institutions compete for students, resources, and prestige. In this scenario, it necessitates the readiness of academic institutions to address the issue of sexual violence by using crisis management strategies.

Through literature synthesis, Vašíčková (2019) defines crisis management as a systematic procedure that guides an organization's endeavors in order to identify and assess the indicators of an impending crisis. She argues that it is important to understand that this process is made up of interconnected steps and rules that help people predict a crisis early, figure out what is going on, and solve it successfully, which helps keep crises from happening (Vašíčková, 2019). The implementation of crisis management operations should be understood as an ongoing and perpetual process, commencing with proactive measures taken by the organization to avoid crises and culminating in the acquisition of organizational knowledge and insights (Vašíčková, 2019). She suggests

that crisis management includes three critical activities: formulating proactive initiatives or methods to averting impending crises, effectively addressing losses and damages, and reinstating corporate efficacy. Integrating crisis management procedures and mechanisms into the overarching organizational strategy is crucial, necessitating the revitalization of the said plan following each subsequent crisis event.

Some scholars have been developing crisis management models (Aldao et al., 2021; Doern, 2016; Vašíčková, 2019), including Indonesian scholar Rhenald Kasali (2003), who introduced the crisis management model in 2003. He views crisis management as a swift process organizations use to identify crisis indicators from their inception and implement strategies to reduce potential harm, losses, and reputational damage. According to Kasali (2003), the organization should take the following five steps in crisis management:

The first step is crisis recognition. Public relations professionals must conduct comprehensive research to identify indicators of crises and establish mechanisms to mitigate potential injury, losses, and reputational damage. The purpose of this preliminary phase is to pinpoint a crisis issue. Clarity is crucial, as it plays a significant role in initiating a crisis.

The second step is crisis analysis. A public relations officer must conduct a thorough study or assessment before communicating. The model employs the 5W+1H method to acquire information and data regarding the issue.

The third step is crisis isolation. In mitigating the potential impact of a large-scale crisis, measurement involving the isolation and quarantine of affected organizations and stakeholders must be immediately implemented.

The fourth step is strategy options. The company needs to set up a generic strategy for what it will do. There are three generic strategies for dealing with crises. 1. Defensive strategy: The steps taken included delaying time, not acting or keeping a low profile, and vigorously strengthening oneself (stonewalling). 2. Adaptive strategy: The measures implemented encompassed a wider range, including policy changes, operational adjustments, compromises, and image corrections. 3. *Dynamic strategy*: This approach is more comprehensive and can lead to a transformation in the company's identity. Options include mergers and acquisitions, new investments, stock sales, the introduction of new programs or the discontinuation of existing ones, the consolidation of power, and the introduction of new issues to divert attention.

The last step is the control program. A control program is an operational action to execute a formulated broad strategy. In a wider context, executives often develop generic

crisis plans to provide a framework for specific actions. Controls are implemented across the company's entities, including branches, industries, real joint ventures, communities, and company divisions.

Crisis management requires a reaction strategy. Selecting the correct response strategy will help the company manage the situation and regain public trust. Public relations theories like Image Restoration Theory (IRT) and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) help design crisis response tactics. Benoit (2020) developed the Image Restoration Theory (IRT) in 1985, focusing on recovering an organization's reputation following a crisis. IRT stresses adapting methods to stakeholder perceptions and the organization's crisis role. This theory outlines five general tactics for managing reputation threats: 1). *Denial*: accusation denied. 2). Avoidance of responsibility: reducing organizational errors. 3). Reducing offense: minimizing the issue or shifting blame. 4). Corrective action: making changes to prevent recurrence. 5). Mortification: repentance and accountability.

Several researchers have praised IRT as a 25-year-old public relations framework (Ferguson et al., 2018). Crisis reaction strategies in IRT include denial, evasion, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit, 2020). Accountability, openness, and responsibility are key strategies (Benoit, 2014). To speed recovery, IRT prioritizes proactive communication to rebuild trust and confidence (Ferguson et al., 2018). This public relations approach has worked in corporate, governmental, and higher education situations (Ferguson et al., 2018).

Coombs (2018) developed SCCT in 2007, which aligns corporate crisis response techniques with the nature of the crisis and stakeholders' perceptions. This notion suggests that crisis communication aims to restore the organization's reputation. Based on accountability, SCCT classifies crises into three: 1). Victim Crisis, occurs when an organization becomes a victim (e.g., natural disaster). 2). Accidental Crisis occurs when the organization bears responsibility for an inadvertent action (e.g., technical error). 3). Preventable Crisis: An organization's incompetence or violation causes a crisis (e.g., sexual harassment). Denial, reduction of responsibility, rebuilding, and bolstering are SCCT techniques for each type.

SCCT is essential in crisis management. SCCT allows organizations to adapt response tactics to crisis types and perceived organizational responsibilities, minimizing reputational damage (Coombs, 2018). Understand that stakeholders are responsible for building confidence and credibility (Cheng, 2020). Studies show that the theory assists organizations in reducing damage, rage, and

crises and adjusting to stakeholder and media contexts (Cheng, 2020; Zhao, 2017; Zhao et al., 2020).

Some studies utilized Kasali's crisis management model (2003) due to its ability to elucidate the procedural aspects and guide organizations in effectively managing crises (Wirman et al., 2021; Yulianti & Boer, 2020). The model encompasses various elements, such as crisis prevention through early warning mechanisms, formulation of crisis response strategies to mitigate reputational damage, and the development of a comprehensive framework for executing specific actions.

Some previous studies have examined how higher education institutions manage sexual harassment crises (Holzweiss & Walker, 2018; Moerschell & Novak, 2020). For instance, Siefkes-Andrew and Alexopoulos (2019) employed quantitative content analysis techniques to examine cases of sexual violence occurring on American university campuses. The findings of this study revealed that a significant proportion (up to 40%) of stories in the media employed journalistic language that either expressed support for or cast doubt on the victim. The results indicated that many media articles utilized journalistic language to endorse or undermine the victim. The study, however, did not devote sufficient attention to the analysis of crisis management.

Fadipe and Bakenne (2020) investigated a Nigerian college's crisis management strategy and stakeholders' reactions after a BBC reporter and an individual on the University of Lagos campus disclosed sexual harassment incidents. The research indicates that a substantial number of Nigerian universities do not prioritize the identification of sexual harassment incidents, as evidenced by their failure to document and address such cases through official channels. While there exists a considerable body of research examining sexual harassment inside college institutions (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Fitri et al., 2021; García-Hernández et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2022; Klein et al., 2022; Konlana & Dangahc, 2023), there remains a lack of studies investigating the implementation of crisis management methods, specifically in university settings, to address sexual harassment. Typically, scholars analyze educational institutions' policies to mitigate and address sexual harassment (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2021; Istiadah et al., 2020; Simanjuntak & Isbah, 2022).

In the realm of response strategy, some scholars have applied situation crisis communication theory, image repair theory, and corporate apologia to address sexual violence crises in universities (Brunson et al., 2020; Fadipe & Bakenne, 2020; Siefkes-Andrew & Alexopoulos, 2019; Works et al.,

2021). Most study findings indicated that the institution issued a formal statement via a press release. However, the study did not identify definitive response strategies that included tangible measures like offering compensation and assistance to the victims or enforcing penalties on university officials for sexual harassment. Consequently, it is crucial to investigate the use of crisis management models in sexual harassment cases in university environments to advance the academic dialogue in public relations, especially in issue and crisis management. This study seeks to identify and assess the crisis management process and the response strategies implemented by the University of Argopuro for sexual harassment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive methodology within a constructivist framework to investigate and articulate the circumstances surrounding crisis management and response tactics implemented by the University of Argopuro in Jember, East Java, particularly concerning occurrences of sexual harassment. The objective was to present an impartial representation of the circumstances. This study used a case study methodology, concentrating on occurrences of sexual harassment at the University of Argopuro. This study technique requires researchers to examine a given event

exhaustively. The method corresponds with Yin's (2011) assertion that case studies are a research methodology defined by their focus on the how and why dimensions, primarily aimed at examining contemporary concerns within real-world settings. This research applied the case study design as Yin (2011) classified, especially a type 1 case study in which the unit of analysis is a singular entity, also known as holistic. This method employed descriptive analysis to clarify the crisis management process and the choice of a crisis response plan for the University of Argopuro the study's subject.

This study uses in-depth interviews and document study as a data collection strategy. The study selected three key informants from the senior administration of the University of Argopuro because of their significant involvement in crisis management. These individuals occupied essential roles within the crisis management team, comprising the spokesperson, the designer of crisis communication techniques, and a member of the Ethics Code Committee at the University of Argopuro. The key informants identified in this study are the Vice Rector of Human Resources and Finance (Key Informant 1), the Head of the Department of Planning, Public Relations, and Collaboration (Key Informant 2), and the Head of the Public Relations Division (Key Informant 3). The study involved a documentation study

that carefully assesses existing records to extract pertinent information (Busetto et al., 2020). The study examined and curated documents relevant to the sexual harassment case at the University of Argopuro, organized essential information, and cross-referenced it with qualitative findings to ensure coherence (Busetto et al., 2020).

After gathering data and transcribing interviews, this study utilized a descriptive qualitative analytical method. Several assessments, including credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity) tests, evaluated the validity and reliability of the acquired data (Sugiyono, 2014). The study then analyzed the data using the Interactive Model technique, as detailed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2019). The data analysis method included data gathering, data condensation, data display, and conclusions formulation as illustrated in Figure 1.

The research presents a comprehensive chronology of the sexual harassment incident at Argopuro University, as reported by Kompas. com (Supriadi, 2021), which transpired on June 4-5, 2021. A female lecturer reported the occurrence to the Dean of the Faculty of Teaching and Education, who recognized the necessity of escalating the matter to the higher administrative level, specifically the rectorate, for confirmation. The Dean completed the
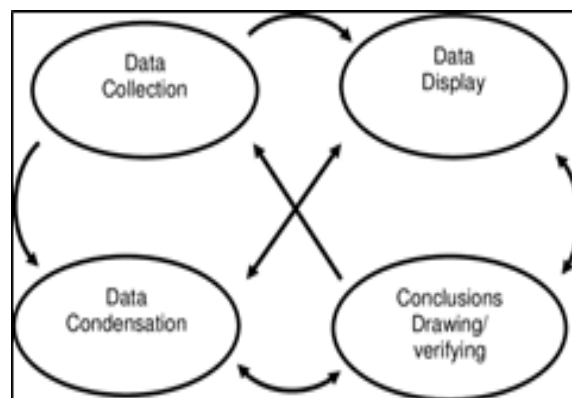
Source: Miles, Saldana & Haberman, 2019

Figure 1 Data Analysis: Interactive Model

verification process on June 10, 2021. The Dean organized a recruitment forum with officials from the University of Argopuro Foundation, revealing that sexual harassment had implicated several previously victimized individuals.

On June 14, 2021, the university administration delivered an official warning letter to the offender. The partner of the affected individual filed an official complaint with the University of Argopuro Foundation, seeking disciplinary measures against the perpetrator. The victim attended a meeting on June 17, 2021, to elucidate the occurrence. The university administration requested the Rector's resignation owing to his participation in sexual harassment incidents on campus. On June 17, 2021, the Rector released a statement regarding self-determination, prompting the foundation manager to organize a meeting with the foundation director and the rectorate, which resulted in the Rector's removal. The university

administration released a statement to offer formal information and clarification regarding the cases of sexual harassment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The comprehensive interview revealed that the Vice Rector of Human Resources and Finance initiated an investigative process to gather evidence and information about instances of sexual assault in response to the emergence of sexual harassment cases. The organization of a hiring forum enabled the offender to share his experiences. As KI1 stated:

"When the issue (sexual harassment) emerged, I initially did not understand it so much because of the facts and evidence we do not have because the incident was out of hand. We have no evidence. However, we have received a complaint letter in the case of complaints. Both parties must clarify the complaint. That is what we need to find at that moment. However, meeting both sides at that time was impossible because the parties were still unwilling to meet. In this way, we can communicate more with the perpetrators regarding the actual events. So, we put more emphasis on evidence information— evidence from the offender's side."

The head of the Department of Planning, Public Relations, and Collaboration (KI2) took the same action to gather information and evidence regarding the sexual harassment cases.

As KI2 stated:
"So, when this case broke out for the first time, the victim immediately communicated with me, where, at the time, I was in the position of Deputy Dean at the Faculty of Teaching and Education. I wanted to hear the chronology of events directly from the victim, in the same faculty as me."

The interview results showed that after both the sexual assault perpetrator and the victim gave a detailed account of what happened, the university carefully looked at the available evidence and gathered information to make an accurate record of the case's timeline, relying on the results of the initial identification process. In collaboration with its foundation, the university organized a hiring forum to provide supplementary remarks to the individuals involved in the sexual harassment incident, including the perpetrators, victims, and other relevant parties. As KI2 stated:
"I felt like I had to share what I heard from the party with my boss. At that time, I cross-checked the truth of this information with my Dean. After listening to my report, the Dean and representatives of the University's Foundation immediately held a hiring forum. It was precisely from the hiring forum that it was finally revealed that the perpetrator of sexual assault did not only assault this victim but also before— there were also different victims."

The findings from interviews with KI1 indicate that after gathering evidence and conducting a factual investigation of a sexual harassment occurrence, the institution enacted a crisis containment strategy on campus.

This strategy sought to guarantee uniform comprehension and communication among internal and external stakeholders, employing traditional mass media and online news outlets.

As stated by KI1:

> "When this case emerged, many parties asked about the truth of the case. The academic staff urged me to explain this case as clearly as possible. They also ordered the university to investigate the case and immediately imposed sanctions on the Rector, who was suspected of sexually assaulting a female lecturer on June 4, 2021. Even the students, through the Student Executive Board, urged us (the university's senior management) to react promptly and take action on this case. Since the internal conditions are quite contentious, I coordinated with the Head of the Department of Planning, Humas, and Cooperation and the Head of the Humas Division to immediately dampen this issue so that it does not spread through the mass media. The three of us discussed with representatives of the university foundation taking strategic steps to mitigate the upset and anxiety in the college environment because of the complex case involving the Rector as a suspected perpetrator of sexual harassment."

KI2 and KI3 made similar statements about implementing isolation measures that aimed to address the problem of sexual harassment. The intention was to curb the spread of sexual harassment among the public and protect its disclosure to journalists. As KI2 stated:

> "I was together with the head of the public relations division, summoned by the Vice Rector of Human Resources and Finance, to discuss how to mitigate the nuisance at the university due to this case. We all agreed to be careful in communicating this case to the internal public, as this case concerns the top leadership of this campus. If we are not careful, I am even worried this case will grow and negatively impact the university."

As KI3 stated:
> "Before this case came up in the mass media and spread in the online news media, some local journalists came to the campus and saw me. At the time, I told the journalists to ask for time to obtain valid data and facts related to the chronology of events through the hearing forums. I am asking the journalists for time to consolidate with the university Foundation's committees and the university's senior management in their efforts to resolve and handle cases involving the Rector of the University of Argopuro."

The data analysis reveals that the university established a crisis management team comprising multiple departments. The university designated each department with specific responsibilities. The team appointed a spokesman when a journalist requests an official remark from the university, including press conferences, door-stopping, or exclusive interviews. The team required the Public Relations Division's assistance to create a press release for distribution to the media. Besides the press release, the team developed the action program to improve the university's reputation and restore stakeholder trust. As stated by KI2:

> "Vice Rector II (Human Resource of Finance) formed a crisis management team that combines the divisions within the university. I was appointed the official spokesperson for the University of Argopuro within that team. All requests for official statements from the university and questions from journalists must be delivered through one door, i.e., the official spokesman must be forwarded so that there

is no difference in statements that will make the case worse. Besides, we have asked the Public Relations Division to draw up a press release to be distributed to the mass media. The results of the forum discussions with all the civitas of the academy agreed to give a genuine explanation to the public about the chronological details of the events and the issues of the Rector's involvement in the case, to convey an apology to the victims, the families of victims, and the community, and to explain the actions we will take in addressing the problem and efforts to improve our reputation and restore public trust in us."

KI3 also explained the tasks that should be done by his division as follows:

"The credit given to us by the university is that we support every journalist who covers us by providing clarification of this announcement. When the case was blown up in the media, we immediately issued a press release stating what happened was true. We cannot shut up if that happens on our campus. We do not want wild news without a clarification process, nor do we want it to be news detrimental to the university. Because that is not a college act; it is an act of self-righteousness. The second thing we do is work with gender-sensitive NGOs to cover our news. It means that we do not want to cover up what happened, and what happened is something that we are strongly opposed to, and we also give strong sanctions to the perpetrators by issuing warnings and asking those concerned to resign."

Regarding the control program, all the key informants agree to claim that the university should establish a Gender Studies Centre to prevent cases of sexual harassment in private universities. As explained by KI2,

…and to prevent this from happening again, based on the advice and input from the faculty, the administrative staff, and the Student Executive Body, the university

needs to establish a Centre for Gender Studies. It is not the first case of sexual harassment, but it turns out there are repeated cases of sexual assault committed by the Rector with other victims. With the hope that, through the Gender Studies Centre, we will be more active and sensitive to cases or issues of sexual harassment on campus, provide support to victims, and provide education to all academic communities about sexual abuse."

Selecting a suitable crisis response strategy is crucial for effective crisis management. The data analysis findings revealed that the public relations division developed several crisis response strategies to address a sexual harassment incident involving the victim. The designated spokesperson elucidated the sequence of events transparently and cooperated with the media seeking information. The team developed several action strategies, such as protecting the victim, providing compensation, imposing resignation sanctions on the perpetrators as a sign of institutional accountability, and establishing a specialized program as a follow-up measure of institutional responsibility.

KI2 gave the following explanation:
"Due to orders from our superiors, we are asked not to cover the incident. We must be open and kind to our fellow journalists if they want to ask questions and find information about the sexual harassment case. We were also asked to explain in detail the efforts and measures taken by the university to resolve this problem, such as giving the perpetrator a sanction, providing protection and compensation to the victim, and explaining the purpose of establishing the Gender Studies Centre. So, I am open
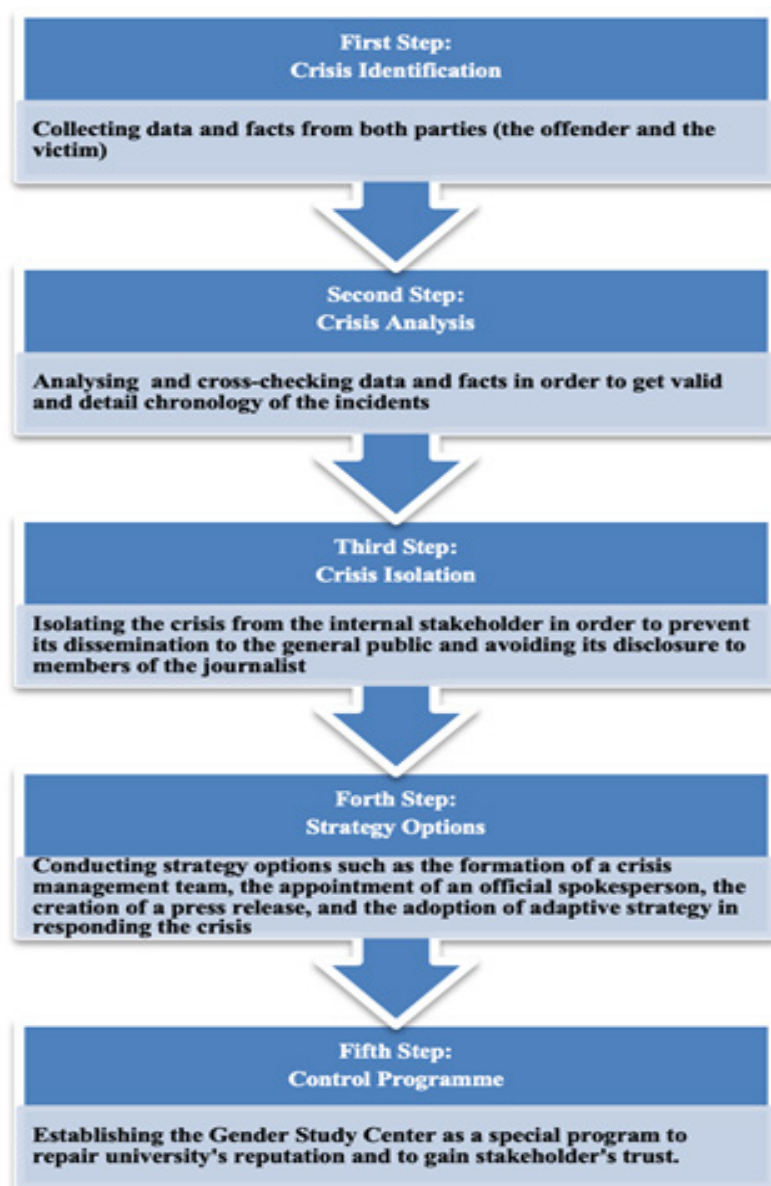
Source: Data analysis results of the study,

Figure 2 Five Steps of Crisis Management Taken by the University of Argopuro

to what it is. Moreover, it must all be the same, both in the press release and the university spokesman's direct statement."

The head of Bureau 3 spearheaded a statement from the university on June 17, 2021, addressing the sexual harassment claims against the Rector. The announcement encompassed critical elements, including recognizing harassment, limitations on the perpetrator's duties, a demand for resignation, and a pledge to support victims by creating a gender studies center. On June 22, 2021, the university foundation dispatched a clarification letter to the regulatory authority of private institutions in East Java, including a chronology of events, phases of crisis management, and the Rector's

retirement.

Crisis management offers a vital framework for decision-makers to discern critical facts and implement strategic planning to address a crisis scenario effectively. The primary purpose of crisis management is to ascertain truth through rational discussion among involved institutions and external stakeholders, including the media and society(Vašíčková, 2019). The study indicated that the university participated in five separate phases of crisis management, as delineated by Kasali (2003) and illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 illustrates the preliminary phase of the university's crisis management process, which involved collecting information from the perpetrator and the victim through individual interviews. This methodology aimed to establish a comprehensive chronology of events from the perspective of each party. After gathering data, the university organized a hearing forum to assess and authenticate the information, engaging the offender, victim, and pertinent stakeholders, including university representatives and committee members. The primary objective of the forum was to obtain an accurate account of the incidents of sexual assault. The university managed the crisis internally to maintain confidentiality and promote effective communication among the parties involved, thereby preventing external

revelation of the case details.

The next step involved the university implementing an adaptive strategy to address a sexual assault incident. This strategy included forming a crisis management team, appointing a spokesperson, issuing press releases, acknowledging the situation, identifying the alleged perpetrator and victim, providing a detailed timeline, and ensuring transparency with the media. The study contends that the initiative aims to promote transparency, integrity, and collaboration while affirming the university's commitment to supporting victims, accepting accountability, and addressing sexual harassment in higher education. The study suggests that the university developed adaptive strategies to address the sexual harassment issue. Figure 3 illustrates how the University of Argopura utilized an adaptive strategy to respond to the crisis. The university developed operational procedures to handle sexual harassment cases, such as establishing a crisis management team, appointing an official spokesperson, and creating a press release (Kasali, 2003).

The final stage of crisis management entails executing a targeted effort, specifically the creation of the Gender Study Centre. The university should establish a specialized department or unit focused on protecting those who have experienced sexual assault
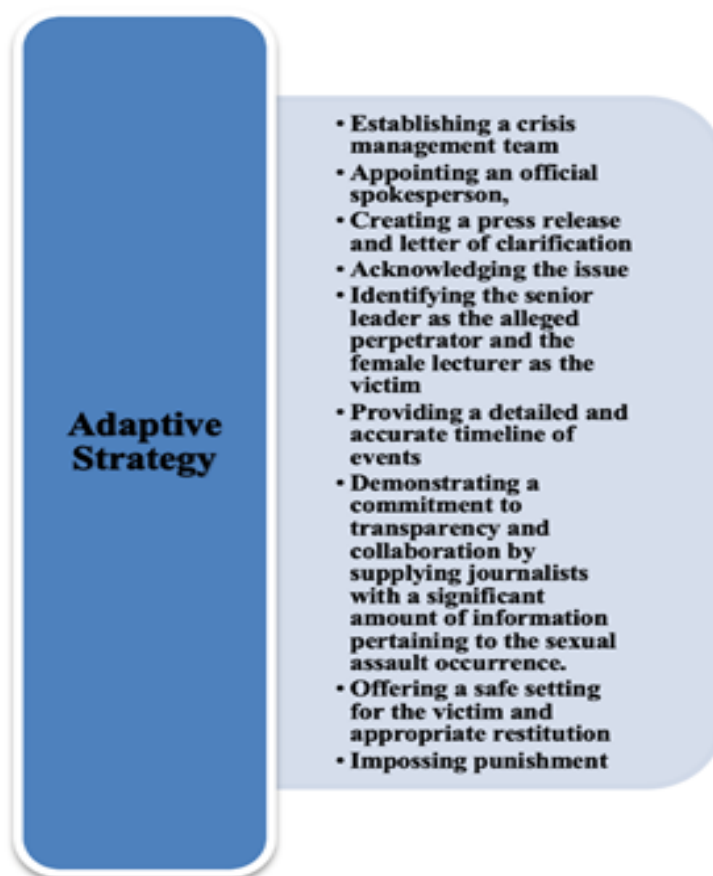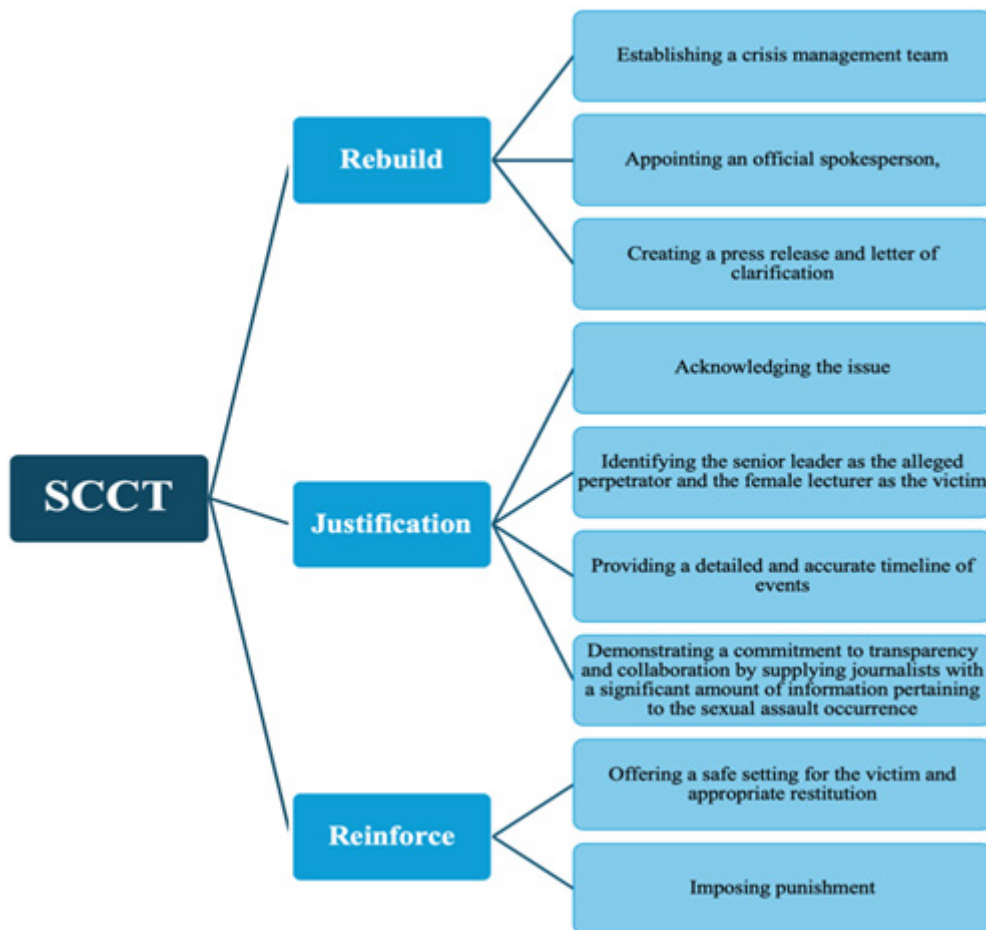
Source: Data analysis results of the study

Figure 3 List of Adaptive Strategy Adopted by the University of Argopuro

and educating the whole academic community about sexual harassment and violence. The university prepared the Gender Study Centre to play a crucial role in preventing future sexual harassment.

The study underlines the benefits of the institution's crisis management plan. The university possesses the necessary tools to gather precise data and information about the sources, triggers, and chronological sequence of sexual harassment incidents that impact female academics within the institution. By acquiring precise and complete data, higher education institutions can effectively identify the issues they face, thereby facilitating the development of appropriate strategies to mitigate potential crises (Bundy et al., 2017). Furthermore, the university has sufficient time to prepare effectively for the forthcoming challenges. Upon obtaining verified and credible information regarding the incidences of sexual harassment, the university will be able to assemble a crisis management team and develop several strategies to address the situation effectively (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019). Executing a crisis plan will improve an

Source: Data analysis results of the study

Figure 4 List of SCCT's Crisis Response Strategy Adopted by the University of Argopuro

organization's readiness for possible crises. Therefore, crisis preparedness is crucial for an organization in crisis management (Akhshik & Beglou, 2023).

Nonetheless, confining the issue internally to prevent public disclosure may be detrimental to the university. The university anticipates that this action will cultivate a poor perception of journalists (Macnamara, 2016). Journalists may perceive the institution as reluctant and uncooperative, tending to postpone disseminating information to the public

(Jackson & Moloney, 2016). Historically, journalists have perceived public relations as a deceptive and frequently detrimental force during organizational crises (Jackson & Moloney, 2016; Macnamara, 2016). Thus, allegations of the institution engaging in media censorship, concealing the circumstances, and possibly orchestrating the timeline to safeguard Argopuro's reputation may reinforce this perspective.

The sexual harassment case involving the top leader of Argopuro University constitutes a

preventable crisis, as the university bears full responsibility for the actions of its leader, who has engaged in an ethical and legal violation (Coombs, 2018). Organizations facing a preventable disaster must focus on choosing the correct response approach to successfully and precisely manage the situation. This study categorizes the university's adaptive strategy, as depicted in Figure 3, into various types of crisis response based on SCCT and IRT, as presented in Figure 4 and Figure 5.

Figure 4 illustrates the institution's utilization of crisis response strategies, specifically the rebuild, justify, and reinforce strategies derived from the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). The rebuilding strategy prioritizes restoring the organization's reputation through accountability and reparation for victims, including public apologies and support services, particularly in sexual harassment cases (Coombs, 2018). The justification strategy aims to diminish perceived harm by contextualizing situations to clarify guilt while acknowledging the need for corrective actions (Coombs, 2018). The reinforcement strategy emphasizes the organization's commendable qualities to bolster confidence, focusing on ethical behavior and innovative initiatives (Coombs, 2018). The study contends that these measures mitigate reputational harm, instill stakeholder confidence, and foster

systemic and cultural enhancements. They achieve this by reconciling accountability with victim-focused and rehabilitation in challenging circumstances.

The university implemented crisis response strategies derived from Image Repair Theory (IRT), concentrating on reducing offensiveness and taking corrective actions, as illustrated in Figure 5. Decreasing offensiveness seeks to diminish the perceived gravity of a problem and alter stakeholder perceptions to alleviate corporate responsibility. These strategies, which include boosting, distinction, and transcendence, contextualize incidents such as sexual harassment to reduce public outrage and highlight the organization's commitment to prevention.

Nevertheless, improper application might undermine trustworthiness. Corrective steps entail implementing reforms, preventive measures, and support networks to exhibit accountability and restore trust, especially in instances of sexual harassment. The research asserts that both tactics aim to mitigate reputational harm and reassure stakeholders of the organization's dedication to crisis resolution and the prevention of similar incidents. When implemented clearly and authentically, these tactics proficiently reconcile reputation restoration with accountability and victim assistance.
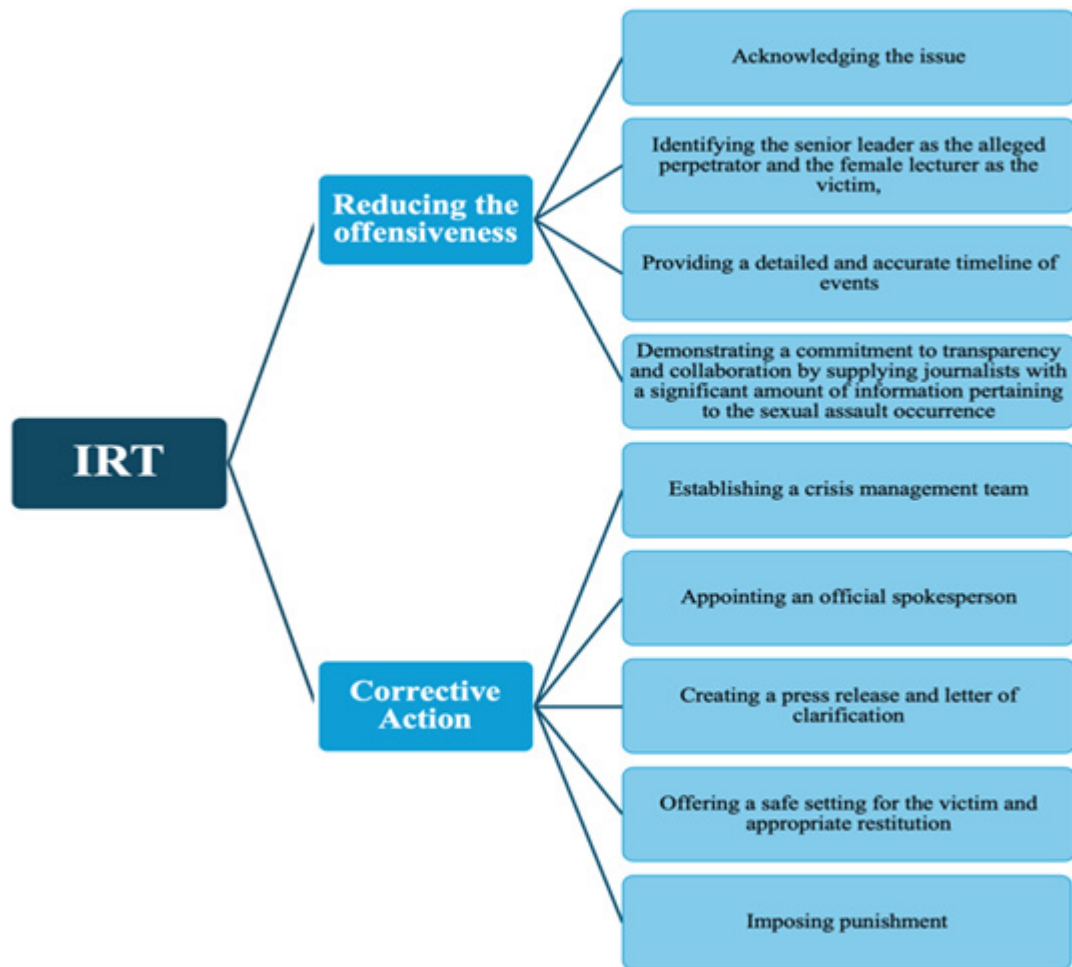
Source: Data analysis results of the study

Figure 5 List of IRT's Crisis Response Strategy Adopted by the University of Argopuro

Adaptive solutions in crisis management encompass organizational adjustments, policy alterations, and concessions to tackle crises effectively (Kasali, 2003). This study asserts that adaptive crisis management tactics correspond with situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and image restoration theory (IRT) in four significant ways. Primarily, there is recognition and openness. SCCT and IRT underscore the significance of acknowledging responsibility and apologizing, which is essential for , reinstating trust. Secondly,

policy and modifications are essential. The theories promote tackling root causes to avert recurrence, consistent with adaptive tactics such as instituting harassment prevention programs and enhancing reporting systems. Thirdly, the engagement of stakeholders. SCCT's emphasis on customized communication and IRT's focus on transparent dialogue facilitate the participation of victims and advocacy organizations in formulating remedies. Ultimately, there was a cultural metamorphosis. Adaptive solutions seek systemic improvements

to tackle the underlying causes of sexual harassment, augmenting the quick reputational remedies of SCCT and IRT with enduring reforms via training and inclusive practices. So, the study concludes that organizations can handle crises well by combining SCCT and IRT within an adaptable framework. Prioritizing the needs of victims while pushing transparency and accountability leads to cultural changes and long-lasting improvements that extend beyond reputation management.

SCCT and IRT provide systematic frameworks for crisis management, yet their use in sexual harassment incidents exposes significant shortcomings. SCCT's emphasis on synchronizing response methods with stakeholder perceptions and organizational accountability frequently overlooks more profound systemic challenges, including power dynamics and cultural ramifications intrinsic to sexual harassment situations (Coombs, 2018). Likewise, IRT emphasizes immediate reputation management via denial and remedial measures, compromising authentic accountability and victim assistance (Benoit, 2020).

Both models encounter difficulties in mitigating stakeholder skepticism, especially in the presence of corporate leadership, as their dependence on transparency and corrective measures may be viewed as disingenuous. Furthermore, the perception of confinement

techniques as censorship can exacerbate public distrust (Jackson & Moloney, 2016). Ultimately, SCCT and IRT inadequately promote the requisite structural changes, including policy reforms and cultivating an inclusive culture, which is vital for averting repeat tragedies. This analysis highlights the necessity for alternate techniques emphasizing long-term cultural development and rapid crisis management solutions.

This study introduces four novel crisis response options developed from corporate adaptation methods in times of disaster. The initial strategy, the attitude statement strategy, prioritizes proactive disclosure about sexual harassment incidents via official statements, news releases, interviews, and social media interaction, thereby ensuring transparency and collaboration. The second strategy, the victim protection plan, emphasizes the protection of victims through preserving their privacy, establishing a secure atmosphere, and providing legal and psychological support. The third strategy, the organizational accountability approach, involves the organization taking complete responsibility for harassment occurrences, forming a crisis management team, and guaranteeing transparency in crisis resolution. The follow-up plan seeks to avert such instances by instituting educational programs and rules that address sexual

Source: Data Analysis Result of the Study

Figure 6 Crisis Response Strategies in Sexual Harassment Case at the University of Argopuro

harassment within the workplace.

Figure 6 demonstrates that the institution implemented many tactics to combat sexual harassment, including the attitude statement strategy, which seeks to transparently convey events to the public and elucidate the university's position against sexual abuse. This strategy underscores the necessity of transparency regarding incidents and the repudiation of apathy toward sexual abuse. The victim protection strategy emphasizes the protection of individuals harmed by sexual harassment by providing a secure environment and appropriate restitution. The organizational accountability strategy aims to address sexual abuse by establishing a crisis management team, appointing an official spokesperson, and implementing disciplinary measures against offenders. Ultimately, the follow-up strategy is to avert future instances of sexual harassment by instituting a Gender Study Center to safeguard victims and promote a culture of prevention within the academic community.

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the crisis management process and response strategies implemented by the University of Argopuro in light of a sexual harassment crisis. It emphasizes the implementation of a structured five-stage crisis management process, which encompasses the following: data collection, event verification, incident containment, formulation of response strategies, and development of preventative programs (5 stages). This study focuses on how adaptive strategy can be creatively combined with Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Restoration Theory (IRT). It creates a new way to deal with crises, especially in higher education institutions. By incorporating these theories, the study has developed a systematic and transparent crisis management approach for sexual harassment incidents, emphasizing victim-centric responses, institutional accountability, and cultural transformation.

The research's strength is its comprehensive empirical analysis of a real-world case, which resulted in four distinctive crisis response strategies: attitude statement, victim protection, organizational accountability, and follow-up initiatives. These strategies collectively exhibit a robust application of SCCT and IRT principles while introducing innovative systemic reform and prevention mechanisms. By demonstrating how adaptive strategies can manage avoidable crises with complex stakeholder dynamics and connecting them with SCCT and IRT frameworks, the study contributes to the body of research on public relations. It incorporates adaptive, long-term reforms, which challenge the traditional limitations of these theories, ensuring that the organization's crisis response extends beyond reputational restoration to tangible cultural changes. In practical terms, the research provides public relations professionals with actionable strategies to manage sensitive crises effectively. It provides a comprehensive framework for addressing stakeholder concerns holistically while mitigating reputational risks by highlighting transparency, victim protection, and organizational responsibility. Including a Gender Studies Centre as a follow-up mechanism illustrates the study's dedication to sustainable and preventive crisis management measures.

The research's novelty stems from creating four unique crisis response strategies beyond traditional theoretical frameworks. These strategies are particularly pertinent for higher education settings because they align with extant crisis communication frameworks and address stakeholder engagement and systemic accountability gap. However, the study's focus on a single crisis management model and its

application within a particular institutional context may limit its generalizability. Future research should investigate these strategies in various cultural settings and organizational types, utilizing alternative crisis management frameworks to validate and refine the proposed approaches. Further research should test the four unique crisis response strategies developed in this study on diverse research subjects employing various crisis management models. In conclusion, by combining theoretical rigor with practical relevance, this study gives academics and practitioners valuable insights into how handling crises honestly and effectively. It does this by laying a crucial foundation for improving crisis response mechanisms.

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