

Crisis Communication Strategies of East Java Regional Police Public Relations in Building a Positive Image Through TikTok

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ABSTRACT

The Indonesian National Police often face crises of public trust and negative public image, which are caused by the spread of negative issues on social media. In this scientific article, the researcher analyze the crisis communication strategies implemented by the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police (Humas Polda Jatim) in response to the growing negative issues about the police circulating among the public. This research aims to understand how Humas Polda Jatim applies crisis communication strategies on the TikTok social media platform to address negative issues regarding the police and build a positive image, as well as how these strategies are used to create two-way communication between the police and the public through content posted on the official TikTok account of Humas Polda Jatim. Therefore, the researcher employs a qualitative approach to compile data obtained from interviews with relevant informants in order to provide clear explanations and insights. The research presented in this scientific article is expected to serve as a reference for relevant articles that may be developed in the future.



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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian National Police (Polri) is one of the institutions that frequently appears in major news headlines in Indonesia, mainly due to the negative issues often directed at the police, which have resulted in a decline in public trust and the institution's overall image. Therefore, communication strategies are needed to rebuild public confidence and restore the police's image in the eyes of society. Corporate communication refers to the management of digital and social media activities that focus on planning and organizing organizational content across various platforms. This includes planning, creating, and scheduling posts to ensure that the content remains engaging, relevant, and aligned with the needs and interests of the target audience (Arif, 2025). In today's fast-paced modern era, many companies and governmental institutions face challenges in implementing effective crisis communication strategies. Crisis communication or crisis management theory itself explains how organizations prepare to respond to and recover from situations that threaten or potentially disrupt operations. In this context, crisis management and reputation theories are used as primary frameworks because it aligns with the objectives of the strategy. In this case, the police institution applies the theory to rebuild public trust and establish a positive image in society. Crisis communication management used in this strategy represents an effort to prevent or address crises faced by the police by maintaining public trust, controlling reputational damage, and restoring normal operations promptly (Nur Ambulani, 2025). Proactive communication is crucial to ensure the rapid dissemination of information, as it significantly influences public perceptions and attitudes during times of crisis (Jackson & Aulia, 2024). A communication strategy is an approach designed to ensure that messages are delivered clearly and received effectively by the audience, enabling the communication to influence their attitudes and behaviours. Such strategies serve as guidelines that help organizations determine their direction and actions in maintaining operational sustainability (Azzahra Luthfiah & Tessa Shasrini, 2024).

Effective communication strategies play a crucial role in mitigating crises and maintaining a positive corporate reputation, particularly across the four stages of emergency management: prevention, response, recovery, and reinforcement (Leonov et al., 2024). By utilizing various available communication channels, organizations can manage crises more effectively while simultaneously

preserving a positive public image (Nasaruddin Siregar et al., 2024). Maintaining a positive image in the eyes of the public requires the use of Image Theory, which essentially discusses how organizations build and sustain trust and positive perceptions among the public. In this context, applying Image Theory to the communication strategies to be used is an excellent idea for building the public image of the National Police (Polri). Image Theory is worth to be implemented because it offers many benefits that can help the National Police to achieve their communication goals from the outset which is to improve their image which has been perceived negatively by society, as well as to prepare for other unexpected crises (Rd. D. Lokita Pramesti Dewi, et al., 2024).

The development of crisis communication in Indonesia is greatly influenced by technological advancements. In the digital era, various issues spread rapidly through media such as Facebook, blogs, websites, mailing lists, and other online platforms that often contain accusations against individuals, companies, or the quality of certain products or services. However, the truth of these accusations is often uncertain (Azzahra Luthfiah & Tessa Shasrini, 2024). Crisis communication strategies must take social media into account as a vital tool because these platforms enable messages to spread within seconds, allowing public institutions to quickly respond to circulating uncertainties and rumors.

Social media has become one of the main communication channels for public institutions, including the police, with the aim of building a positive image and establishing good relations with the public. TikTok is one such platform, the rapid growth of TikTok in Indonesia right now with more than 157.6 million active users and the largest user base in the world as of July 2024, marks significant shift in the public's information consumption patterns, which originally relied on electronic media such as television and radio, but now it shifted to social media, especially among the younger generation (Marchelin, 2025). Not only does TikTok serve as a form of entertainment, but it has also become a source of information and news, with 34% of Indonesians in 2025 reporting that they use TikTok to obtain news. This trend is driven by the fact that more than 60% of Indonesians no longer trust the news they see or read on non-social media platforms, a sharp increase from 11% in 2021 (Park et al., 2025).

The Indonesian National Police (Polri) utilizes TikTok as a crisis communication medium to build a positive image amid the growing challenge of declining public trust in the institution (Z.S. Sudar et al., 2024). Recent surveys indicate that public perceptions of the police tend to be negative, with 33.2% of respondents rating law enforcement performance as "average" and 23.4% rating it as "poor" (Rizaty, 2022). Negative sentiment recorded by Indonesia Political Indicator is further reinforced by narratives circulating on social media, where police-related issues can quickly go viral and significantly influence public opinion (Z.S. Sudar et al., 2024). Therefore, the Two-Way Communication Theory is applied by the police institution. This theory emphasizes that communication between an organization and its public should not be one-directional but two-directional, where the organization also listens to inputs or feedback from the public. In this context, to build and maintain effective two-way communication, proper public relations management is required. Public relations management plays an essential role in rebuilding the image of Polri, which has been perceived negatively by society. Through this management, the feelings, attitudes, expectations, perceptions, and viewpoints of the public toward the police institution can be understood and used as foundation for Polri to improve its performance and past shortcoming in order to build stronger public trust in the future (Agnita Yolanda, et al., 2021).

Crisis communication strategies through social media, particularly TikTok, have become highly relevant because the platform offers interactive features such as short videos, challenges, duets, and comment sections that enable institutions to communicate in a two-way manner, fostering emotional closeness between the institution and the public (Khairunnisaa et al., 2025). The content uploaded on the TikTok account of the East Java Regional Police Public Relations Division (Humas Polda Jatim) generally focuses on education, transparency, involvement in police and community activities as well as the efforts from the police officers to humanize by participating in trending viral content. This strategy aligns with the two-way symmetric communication theory and relationship management theory, where in active and responsive interaction with the public that can enhance the community trust and loyalty.

Recent studies emphasize that TikTok is highly effective for building institutional image in Indonesia, as it is one of the most popular social media platforms in the country, particularly among younger generations who tend to avoid mainstream media and place greater trust in authentic and interactive content (Idrus Jamalulel et al., 2025; Khairunnisaa et al., 2025). In addition, the use of

influencers and community collaborations on TikTok has been proven to expand message reach and enhance institutional credibility. However, several challenges persist, such as the risk of misinformation, the need for rapid response before, during, and after the crisis, and the importance of maintaining consistency and transparency in communication (Chandra, 2025).

Case studies in Indonesia, such as the crisis handling of the Vina Cirebon case, demonstrate that weaknesses in crisis communication strategies and the use of social media can directly impact the decline of public trust in the police (Chandra, 2025). Therefore, developing an adaptive, data-driven crisis management strategy that leverages TikTok's creative features has become an urgent necessity for police institutions to build and maintain a positive image in the digital era (Jeanis et al., 2021; Najihah & Septiani, 2024).

Another case study that occurred in the jurisdiction of the East Java Regional Police (Humas Polda Jatim) is the crisis at the Kanjuruhan Stadium, where police actions were considered excessive, resulting in a drastic decline in public trust and a negative image of the police. The National Police (Polri) has attempted to rebuild its reputation and regain public confidence to restore the diminished public trust (Rahman & Astriani, 2023).

Based on the background described above, this research aims to analyze how the crisis management strategies implemented by the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police (Humas Polda Jatim) through TikTok content that play a role in building a positive image of the police, as well as to identify the various challenges and opportunities that arise in its application amid the dynamics of public opinion and the advancement of digital communication technology. These three theories serve as the main theoretical foundations of this research, as they are interconnected with one another. Crisis management theory focuses on how an organization responds to crisis situations, image theory emphasizes the restoration of reputation after the crisis, and two-way communication theory acts as the primary mechanism for applying the first two theories, particularly in crisis management and reputation recovery through communication with the public. In this context, such communication is conducted through social media, specifically TikTok, where the strategies used on the platform are funded by the public and intended for the public interest, in line with the original purpose of implementing this strategy (Iriantara, 2022)

Therefore, the problem formulation in this research includes examining how the crisis communication strategies used by the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police (Humas Polda Jatim) through TikTok platform shape a positive institutional image, and how the implementation of crisis management strategies based on two-way communication between the police and the public is carried out through TikTok content. In line with this problem formulation, the research aims to analyze the crisis communication strategies employed by the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police on TikTok in building a positive image, describe the application of two-way communication between the institution and the public, also identifying various challenges and opportunities in utilizing social media as a primary instrument for fostering public trust in the police

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative research method to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of interview participants and the observational findings related to crisis communication strategies in building the police's image through content on the TikTok account of Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police (Humas Polda Jatim). This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher the flexibility to explore perceptions, opinions, experiences, and their influence on the public regarding police-related content on the TikTok platform. Although this research focuses on a specific topic, the researcher conducted the investigation broadly, allowing the data obtained to be diverse. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique considered appropriate for the type of data generated through interviews, as it concentrates on a single overarching theme, the central theme of this research.

This research utilizes two types of data, primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with informants selected by the researcher based on predetermined criteria. The researcher employed a purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting subjects based on specific aims and criteria relevant to the research topic. Therefore, the informants chosen for this research were members of Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police who were closely related to the context of the research. The researcher analyzed the responses gathered from these

interviews, with the interviewed informants being active members responsible for monitoring content on the official social media accounts of Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police.

Table 1. Research Informants Data Table

Initials	Information	Position
RYD	Informant 1	Member of Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police
MES	Informant 2	Member of Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police
KMBMS	Informant 3	Member of Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police

Secondary data were obtained through observations conducted by the researcher on relevant resources, specifically the comment sections of police-related content on the official TikTok account of Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police. These secondary data were used to strengthen and compare with the primary data, as well as with previous findings from earlier researchers who studied similar topics.

There are two primary techniques used for data collection in this research, which is in-depth interviews and observation. The interviews were conducted both offline (in person) and online via Whatsapp application with active members that responsible for monitoring content on the TikTok social media account of Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police. This technique enables the researcher to explore and gather detailed information regarding the informants perceptions and experiences, as well as providing a space or medium for them to share their views, perceptions, expectations, and preferences related to social media content that can help build the police's image in the public's eyes.

The observation was conducted directly by the researcher by examining various public reactions or comments on police-related content posted on the TikTok account of Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police. The researcher documented the communication patterns that emerged, the types of content being observed, as well as the public's reactions and interactions with one another in the comment section. This observation provided broader insights, as it included a wide variety of comments from diverse individuals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The Communication Strategies of East Java Regional Police Public Relations (Humas Polda Jatim) in Addressing Negative Issues on TikTok

Humas Polda Jatim actively shares content about police activities within communities, highlighting their role as public servants and protectors. Positive police activities that are rarely exposed on social media are shared through the Humas Polda Jatim TikTok account to restore the public's damaged trust and the declining image of the police caused by negative issues involving rogue officers. These efforts aim to show that there are still police officers who are good, responsible, and committed to upholding the authority entrusted to them by the people and the state, consistently serving, protecting, and safeguarding the public from disturbances to security and public order.

The East Java Regional Police Public Relations Division (Humas Polda Jatim) often encounters negative issues related to the police on TikTok. This occurs due to the ease with which information spreads widely without verification, combined with the tendency of the general public in Indonesia to readily accept circulating false information as truth. This makes it increasingly difficult for the police to calm public outrage triggered by negative issues about the police whose accuracy is still uncertain. Nevertheless, a humanistic and educational approach remains the primary strategy used by the Humas Polda Jatim team in addressing these negative issues.

“The Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police addresses negative issues on TikTok through a humanistic and educational approach. Every piece of circulating information is first analyzed to ensure its content and accuracy....” (Informant 1, 04 November 2025).

In addressing negative issues directed at the Indonesian National Police that have led to a decline in public trust and institutional image, the East Java Regional Police Public Relations Division (Humas Polda Jatim) actively showcases the humanistic side of police officers, an aspect that is rarely highlighted on social media. Through a strategy of viralizing positive content, such as social care initiatives, responsive public services, and community-oriented activities. By employing this humanistic and educational approach, Humas Polda Jatim has significantly rebuilt its reputation and public image, while public trust previously damaged by circulating negative issues has gradually begun to recover. In this way, public trust is restored not only through clarifications but also through positive narratives and concrete actions that demonstrate the police’s presence and dedication to serving the community.

Information related to the police that frequently goes viral and spreads widely is not always entirely true, nor is it entirely false. Some pieces of information that contain negative issues about the police — which do occur and are actions committed by certain rogue officers — are often used by irresponsible hoax spreaders. For example, when the police institution is in an ‘bad situation’ or experiencing a crisis whose truth is still under investigation, there are some irresponsible netizens or social media users who deliberately bring up past negative issues involving the police. Their intention is to put pressure on the police so that it becomes more difficult for them to take action in handling the current crisis. This phenomenon occurs frequently, making it challenging for the East Java Regional Police Public Relations Division to manage the negative issues that are developing.

“Carrying out counter-opinions using shadow accounts in response to negative issues about the police. Conducting takedowns of content containing negative issues about the police to minimize widespread virality, and profiling the accounts that create such content in order to report them to the supervisor.” (Informant 2, 05 November 2025).

There are several actions that can be taken to respond to the unrest on social media caused by content containing negative issues about the police. The Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police has its own standard operating procedures to handle such situations. In general, when viral content containing negative issues about the police emerges, the Public Relations Division will carry out counter-opinion efforts using shadow accounts, aiming to calm the anger of netizens or social media users who have been provoked by content whose accuracy is still unknown. The next step is for the Public Relations personnel to take down the content in order to minimize its spread before it becomes even more viral. After that, profiling of the content creator’s account will be conducted to identify the irresponsible individual behind the spread of the information. The results will then be reported to the leadership, who will determine the necessary follow-up actions.

The Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police plays an active role on several social media platforms that have broad user networks. Therefore, information openness, transparency, and accountability in presenting police performance are highly important and significantly influence the institution’s public image. The content and information displayed become key elements in building the police’s reputation and image, while also not ruling out the possibility of unwanted incidents. The development of technology such as AI (Artificial Intelligence) allows users to manipulate various types of material obtained from the internet. This has become a concern for the leadership toward police officers who are active on social media, as there is a fear that uploaded content could be used as the basis for rumors or negative issues that may later escalate into problems for the institution. As a result, the monitoring of these social media platforms is actively carried out with the aim of conducting the “early detection” activities typically performed by the police.

“First, the Public Relations Division must monitor social media platforms, including TikTok, to detect trends of negative issues, hoaxes, hate speech, or viral videos that may affect the institution’s image. As stated, the police public relations unit must be ‘adaptive in facing digital attacks and the post-truth era...’ (Informant 3, 05 November 2025).

The Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police actively monitors relevant media platforms, in this context is TikTok, to conduct early detection of emerging negative issues, hoaxes, and viral hate speech that may affect the police institution's image. As stated, the Police Public Relations unit must be 'adaptive in facing digital attacks and the post-truth era,' as mentioned by Informant 3 in the argument above. Once detection is carried out and it becomes clear that negative issues have emerged, this is where the crisis communication strategy begins. The Public Relations Division prepares verified data and facts, after which it delivers official statements that are clear, accurate, and easy for social media users to understand (in this case, TikTok users, who are predominantly young people). This aligns with the role of the Public Relations Division as an 'information provider,' aiming to balance the narratives circulating online.

The Attitude of the East Java Regional Police Public Relations Division in Responding to Public Suggestions and Feedback

The Two-Way Communication Theory is applied by the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police in responding to suggestions and feedback from the public by providing space for people to express their opinions, whether through the police's social media channels or directly at the police office. By considering the feedback provided by the public, the Public Relations team can analyze these suggestions and responses, which may serve as valuable input for matters that require consideration, in accordance with the feedback received.

In rebuilding the police's reputation and image that have been damaged due to circulating negative issues, the police institution naturally requires suggestions and input from the perspective of those who feel disappointed, which is the public. In this regard, the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police does not carelessly accept every suggestion and feedback, as such input may later serve as a basis for rebuilding public trust through the content they produce on TikTok. The suggestions, criticisms, and input accepted by the Public Relations team are those that are considered substantial, originating from responsible netizens or social media users, regarded as valuable, and truly worthy of being used as a foundation by the Public Relations Division.

"Every comment, suggestion, or response from the public on TikTok is addressed by the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police with an open, friendly, and enthusiastic attitude. Public responses are regarded as a form of concern and valuable input for improving police services..." (Informant 1, 04 November 2025).

In responding to the suggestions and feedback provided by the public, the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police replies to every comment, suggestion, and response with openness, friendliness, and enthusiasm. This is because such input is regarded as a form of public concern and valuable contribution toward improving police service performance. Every suggestion and response given in the interest of mutual improvement by community members who still trust and believe in the police is addressed as positively as possible by the Public Relations Division through relaxed yet polite interactions, aiming to maintain comfort and create warm two-way communication between the police and the public so that people feel appreciated and heard. In this way, the police's image and reputation will naturally improve, as this humanistic response also serves as a strategy to rebuild the institution's positive image in the digital sphere. The two-way communication that is fostered also creates opportunities to strengthen the relationship between the public and the police.

The two-way communication theory is something that has already been implemented and is continuously being strengthened by the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police in responding to the attitudes of the digital public toward the police institution. Through this approach, the public is able to freely express their opinions about the police—whether positive or negative. As long as these opinions are delivered appropriately, remain acceptable, and are still related to police matters, the Public Relations Division will continue to humanistically accommodate them, in accordance with one of its functions as an 'information platform'.

"Responding with a consistently humanistic attitude toward social media users, especially on TikTok, and addressing matters related to public complaints and other concerns for further processing and follow-up." (Informant 2, 05 November 2025).

This is also supported by Informant 3, who stated that the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police responds with a consistently humanistic attitude toward netizens or the digital public, especially TikTok users, when they express their opinions, particularly opinions that are considered important and needed by the police..

“As members of the East Java Police Public Relations Division, we must respond with a consistently humanistic attitude toward social media users, especially on TikTok, and address matters related to public complaints and other concerns for processing and follow-up, so that no critical mistakes occur during the handling process.” (Informant 3, 05 November 2025).

The analysis shows that the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police is attentive to suggestions and feedback provided by the public. In particular, if the suggestions or feedback contain information related to public complaints, the information will be received and used to carry out further follow-up actions regarding the complaint. Even when the suggestions and feedback are not directly related to public complaints, the Public Relations Division's way of responding remains unchanged. Maintaining a humanistic approach, the Public Relations Division will accept all suggestions and feedback submitted by the public.

The attitude of the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police in responding to public suggestions and feedback is also an important point, as this attitude is part of the crisis communication strategy carried out by the division in handling related negative issues on the TikTok social media platform. In addition to implementing standard operational procedures in addressing these negative issues, the Public Relations Division must also pay close attention to the attitude displayed to the public or netizens when responding to their suggestions and feedback. This attitude will influence whether the level of public trust and the police's positive image will increase or instead decline.

DISCUSSION

Based on the data findings presented above, the researcher concludes that the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police plays a crucial role in building the police's reputation, public trust and positive image. The utilization of mass media in this research represented by TikTok serves as a key platform through which the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police team actively addresses negative issues directed at the police. These issues, which often circulate without verified accuracy, constitute a crisis that the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police must manage.

According to the crisis management strategy theory discussed in the research conducted by Nur Ambulani (2025), addressing a crisis requires efforts to prevent and mitigate the situation by responding to and recovering from the perceived threat. Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police, through its digital media accounts particularly TikTok, has established its own procedures for confronting, managing, and recovering from crisis situations that arise amid the spread of negative issues. These effort include maintaining and upholding public trust, controlling reputational damage, and restoring normal operations promptly. In doing so, Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police is able to safeguard its image and reputation in the public's eyes.

In line with other research, such as the Image Theory study conducted by Rd. D. Lokita Pramesti Dewi et al. (2024), it is explained that continuing to build, maintain, and preserve public trust and positive perceptions especially when the image of the Indonesian National Police has been viewed negatively and public trust has declined, serves as an effective approach for developing more positive image of the police in the future, as well as preparing the institution to face potential future crisis.

In relation to the suggestions and feedback found in the results above, Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police has applied the Two-Way Communication Theory as a space for dialogue and the expression of public aspirations, where community members can freely share their suggestions and responses while feeling valued and heard by the public relations division. In a relaxed yet polite manner, Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police maintains an open, friendly, and enthusiastic attitude, as the suggestions and feedback provided by the public reflect their concern and desire for the police institution to deliver better services in the future.

Two-way communication through social media platforms, particularly TikTok, serves as a space that helps the police institution improve its performance in accordance with public expectations. Previous research conducted by Agnita Yolanda et al. (2021) on the Two-Way Communication Theory

highlights the importance of maintaining and nurturing communication with the community by utilizing effective public relations management. Through this approach, the feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and expectations of the public can be observed and conveyed, allowing the police to use this input as a foundation for providing better services in the future.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings on the crisis communication strategies of the Public Relations Division of the East Java Regional Police (Humas Polda Jatim) in building a positive image through TikTok, it can be concluded that Humas Polda Jatim plays an active role in this effort. There are two vital aspects carried out by Humas Polda Jatim: the strategies employed in addressing negative issues on TikTok and the attitude adopted in responding to public suggestions and feedback. The conclusion drawn from interviews regarding the first vital aspect indicates that Humas Polda Jatim has its own Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in handling such issues by implementing various necessary measures.

As for the conclusion drawn from interviews regarding the second vital aspect, regardless of the form of suggestions and feedback provided by the public, Humas Polda Jatim strives to create two-way communication in which public input can be conveyed effectively. This approach allows the public to feel appreciated and heard, fostering a sense of closeness to the police through a warm, family-like atmosphere. Consequently, public trust and the positive image of the police are expected to improve, which aligns with the initial objective of implementing this crisis communication strategy.

The suggestions that the author can offer in relation to the context examined in this scientific article are as follows :

Socialization and Education on Social Media Use for Police Officers, further socialization and education regarding the use of social media for police officers are highly necessary. The provided education should cover appropriate and responsible ways of engaging on social media, starting from how to comment on certain content to how police officers should create and publish their own content. Any matter or content associated with the police is inherently sensitive to the public. Therefore, such socialization and education are essential to ensure that comments or content posted by police officers are not violating the regulations and furthermore can offer education, insight, also information to the public regarding matters related to law enforcement.

Futher Monitoring, further monitoring of circulating content especially content that related to the police is necessary, to prevent incidents that may spark controversy between the public and the police, which could lead to disruptions in public safety and order.

The research presented in this scientific article is expected to serve as a reference for relevant articles that may be developed in the future. Thus, this scientific article can be useful and assist other researchers.

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